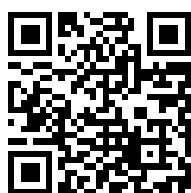


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## **THE HARD WHITE ROAD**







“ . . . a grey old town,  
At the end of a hard white road.”





*The*  
**HARD WHITE ROAD**  
*A Chronicle of the Reserve Mallet*

BY

**ALDEN ROGERS**

SECTION "M", T.M.U. 184;  
PROVISIONAL COMPANIES "B" AND "H"  
M.T. COMPANY 844



*Through the tinted village creep  
Under the moon,  
Great beetles, one by one  
Whirring in tune.*

*Blind beetles, one by one  
That drop their iron spawn  
And scuttle off. The dust streaks grey  
Across the dawn.*

—E. WHITTLESEY

**BUFFALO**  
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To THE TWO WHOSE LOVE, COURAGE AND GOOD CHEER  
THROUGH THESE UNCERTAIN DAYS WAS EVER  
A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION  
MY  
MOTHER AND FATHER



## PREFACE

THIS book has been written in fulfillment of a promise made to those who were witnesses to the daily entries in the diary I kept while overseas. It was the only detailed journal kept by any of the members of the various companies with which I served and many of the men asked me to send them copies when I returned to the States and could have it printed.

The diary in its original form, written as it usually was at the end of a hard day's work, would have been of little interest to anyone, as no attempt had been made to make it readable. It was merely a record of events in choppy sentences and, on account of the monotony of much of our work, contained a great deal that is more pleasant to forget.

I have attempted to record here in as impersonal a form as possible such events as came under my observation which I thought might be of lasting interest to those who took part in them, and I have kept as closely to the truth with regard to dates and facts as I possibly could.

Two or three books and numerous articles dealing with the work of the Reserve have been published, but most of it has been accepted by those who were 'there' as nothing more than so much hot air written to amuse the gullible public. There is no coloring for effect in these pages, and I can produce witnesses to testify to the verity of every incident recorded.

My comrades will recognize many of these incidents as events in which they have taken part and from them be

## PREFACE

able to recall many others in which I had no share. Necessarily this cannot include a complete history of the Reserve, but what it does contain is fairly representative of the work done by individual members.

My apology is not for the literary demerit of these pages—for I make no pretense at being a writer—but is rather for the length of time I have taken to finish the work.

I am deeply indebted to the Field Service Bulletin for the use of many of the plates of illustrations which have appeared in their pages; and to Roger Squire and Frank Rice for permission to use their valuable snapshots as illustrations. There are other photographs included whose origin I have not been able to trace, but I am deeply indebted to the men who took them, whoever they are.

A. R.

*Buffalo, New York  
October, 1922*

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## **THE HARD WHITE ROAD**



## INTRODUCTION : THE RESERVE MALLET

"WHAT branch of the Service were you in?" is a question I have been asked a great many times and nine times out of ten the questionnaire registers a blank expression when I tell him that I was a member of the Reserve Mallet.\* The French title bewilders him. My second, qualifying remark that it was a French ammunition train brings, usually, a ray of light into his eye. A man understands that it was a motor truck train, but a woman often has a confused idea of locomotives, freight cars and Frenchmen.

To anyone who has not read the hair-raising articles about us which Dave Darrah, our inspired press-agent, managed to get into the pages of the "Stars and Stripes" during that period when every outfit in the A. E. F. was edifying the public through that same medium with detailed accounts of just how *they* won the war, the Reserve might just as well have never existed.

It is my intention, therefore, to put down here in black and white just exactly what the Reserve Mallet was, so that in the future when anyone asks me the above question I can take forth this volume, turn to the proper page and say: "There is all the information you desire."

The Reserve Mallet was a paradox. It was unquestionably the worst military organization in the A. E. F. and yet it was just as unquestionably, as statistics will prove,

\*Mallet: pronounced Mäl-lay'.

the best motor truck train in the whole U. S. Army. It was the most unpleasant outfit to be in that one can imagine, and yet we had more freedom and pleasure than almost any other organization in the A. E. F. It had about as bad luck in a military way as any outfit, other than that regiment in Siberia, and yet it had the most providential good luck possible in many instances where an ill-starred outfit would have met disaster. And thus it was, all the way through, the worst and yet the best. We wouldn't sell our experiences for a million dollars nor would we undergo them again for the same sum.

The Reserve Mallet was the third great automobile reserve of France. It received its name from its commander, Commandant (Major) Mallet. Originally the entire personnel of the Reserve was French. In April 1917 Commandant Doumenc, who headed the entire French *Service Automobiles*, asked Mr. Piatt Andrews of the American Field Service if the men who were coming to France to drive ambulances could be put on motor trucks instead. The proposition was put before the men and they decided that inasmuch as they had come to France to help it was only right for them to go where they were most needed. And thus the Cornell Ambulance Unit, taking over a section of trucks on May 8, 1917, marked the beginning of the Americanization of this outfit. It was well over a year before this transformation was complete.

In size the Reserve was a little larger than a battalion, about 1100 men all told, and called a Reserve because it was not attached permanently to any particular Army, Army Corps or Division, but shifted from one part of the front to another according to where the pressure was great-

est. It was thus that those who were in it from the beginning have participated in eleven major operations, offensive and defensive. G. H. Q., however, only recognizes eight of these.

Our orders came from the French, our pay from the Americans; part of our rations from the French and part from the Americans. We enjoyed the liberties and privileges of the French poilu until we went on furlough at which time we came in contact with the American Military Police, who took half the joy out of life for everyone on leave.

Many of our friends have thought that because we were with the French Armies we wore the French uniform. Not so. When we did get clothes, which was not very often, they came from the Q. M. C. of the U. S. Army.

Whether in the end it was a curse or a blessing that the Reserve had only one really military officer is a question that is debatable. After our brief sojourn at Le Mans most of us were inclined to believe it was a blessing. It was, however, rather unfortunate that most of the enlisted personnel of the Reserve did not understand the nature of this blessing. All that they saw was the military inefficiency of their officers. But the military game is a hard one to learn and still harder to put in practice and the schooling our lieutenants were given at the Meaux School for officers of the *Service Automobiles* was pitifully inadequate to fit them for handling a company of men. Nearly all these officers were from the old American Field Service, and there was the cause of most of the dissatisfaction among the men who had been sent over from the States in organized Motor Truck Companies. On arriving in France they were sent in compliance with the original plan of G. H. Q. to be trained

by the men of the old A. F. S., who knew the practical end of the game. After their training they were supposed to be reorganized in their original companies and serve with the American Army. One train, the 101st Motor Supply Train of the 26th Division, actually did complete this schedule. The other companies arrived in the early spring of 1918 for their training, just at the time when the high pressure started which was to last until after the Armistice was signed, and so great was the need of truck drivers both in the Reserve and in the U. S. Army that the original plan was given up. The companies of the 407-8 and 9th Motor Supply Trains, then training with us, became part of the Reserve under our officers and non-commissioned officers. It was unfair to strip them of their officers and put them under men, who, although they knew convoy work from A-Z, did not know as much about drill and army paper work as many of the men who were now their subordinates. The Field Service men had been picked as officers principally because of their convoy ability, familiarity with the French language, and general prestige, except in a few instances such as are always found, when a man became an officer through boot-licking or petty politics. They were not military men in the true sense of the word.

Those, then, are the reasons why the men of the American Field Service were regarded with such dissatisfaction by the drafted men from the States.

Major Gordon Robinson was the one truly military officer that we had. He had received his training at West Point and therefore knew of things military from every viewpoint. During the winter of 1917-18 he took delight in putting the fear of the gods in our hearts by his weekly in-

spections. As long as he was with us we resembled, more or less, a military outfit. But in March he was called to take charge of the Motor Transport School at Decize and for the next few months the Reserve suffered from the unpardonable management of his successor, whose incompetence was responsible for his removal a little later. From then until the final days of the Reserve's existence the command was held by Major Potter, a capable officer and fine gentleman who did all that he could for the men under him, but who did not have the military background of Major Robinson.

The regime of unmilitary officers had its advantages as well as its disadvantages for we were not bothered much by drill, reveille, taps and other boring military customs, except at intervals of about two months, at which times our officers would feel that we were becoming too lax and would post a military schedule on the bulletin board which, after two or three days, everyone would proceed to forget.

Thus we enjoyed a great deal more liberty than we would have had in an American Sector. When our officers weren't using their staff cars for the same purpose we could often get them for sightseeing and joy-riding trips.

The greatest disadvantage of this unmilitary existence was the lack of discipline. A sergeant going after a detail secured better results if he used a little tact and asked rather than ordered the men to do the necessary work. The reason for this was that there was no punishment for offenders except in a few rare cases. The men did just as little work as they thought they could get by with when in camp, but while they were on convoy they did splendidly and at times did more than seemed humanly possible.

The court-martial records of the Reserve are a disgrace. Two cases which stand out above the others will serve as illustrations. The first is the case of a sergeant who was reduced to the rank of a private because a piano-moving detail of which he had charge gathered around the piano in the back of the truck and sang songs while passing through the streets of Soissons. To have a court-martial record against you is a very serious thing in the Army for it is a stain on your service record which can never be removed. Although his conduct was reprehensible it certainly did not merit any such serious action. The second case is that of a man whose name I will not mention either. He had the following charges against him with witnesses to testify in each instance: insubordination, disorderliness, drunk on duty, theft of government property, breaking jail on a previous sentence and assault with intention to kill. Offenses which warrant a long sentence at Fort Leavenworth. Through a technicality of military law, with which our officers were not familiar, the punishment which was due him could not be administered and he was simply reprimanded and let go. With such an example of justice before them the men knew that they could get away with almost anything and proceeded to do so.

Another item that made the Reserve unpleasant to be in was the matter of promotions. After Major Robinson left came the great regime of acting-sergeants, acting-corporals, acting-cooks, everyone receiving private's pay and acting in these higher capacities. Warrants applied for in February and March 1918 did not come through until the middle of May the following year. We could have made good use of the 1500 francs difference in pay which was

due us, but as our warrants were dated May 12, 1919, and not the date they were applied for, there was no way to convince the paymaster that he owed us any money.

This chapter, however, is to explain what the Reserve was, rather than to catalog our many complaints.

We retained the French system of organization. Over all was the Reserve Headquarters, entirely French in personnel. In this office were the Headquarters of the two *Groupements* of the Reserve, *Groupements 8 and 9*. In each *Groupement* were four *Groupes*, each known by the name of its commander: Groupe Browning, Lieut. Browning commanding. A *Groupe* consisted of four companies, 18 trucks to a company. The theoretical strength of a company was 60 men, officers and non-commissioned officers included. As a matter of fact there never was a company in the Reserve which had a full complement of men; they averaged about forty men to a company.

The office in charge of the Americans in the Reserve was known as the *American Mission*. Its duty was to feed, clothe and pay the men. Pay came regularly; food shortage was never serious though we often wished that they would vary the diet of beans, corned beef, and goldfish (salmon). We never did have enough clothes so that the whole company could make a decent showing at an inspection until the week before we sailed for home. The shoe question became so serious that during the winter of 1918-19 we had to beg shoes from the Red Cross at Sedan.

The work of the Reserve was to supply the needs of the Army, Army Corps or Division to which it was temporarily attached. During the war the Reserve hauled principally ammunition and trench material. It also hauled troops,

75mm cannon and caissons, 37mm cannon, trench mortars machine guns, baby tanks, baggage, food, refugees, in fact anything that lacked means of transportation.

The quantity of material hauled can be judged from one swift glance at statistics: during the five summer months of 1918, June through October, the Reserve hauled for the French Armies more ammunition than the American Army used in its entire participation in the war.

And now I hope you have a fair idea of what the Mallet Reserve was: an unmilitary, undisciplined, dissatisfied, sloppy looking outfit, lazy in camp but unparalleled for work on the road. Whatever is said against it as a military organization matters not one whit. In line of duty the Reserve never failed no matter what hour of the day or night the orders came, nor how exhausted the men were from overwork, nor whether our ancient and honorable 5 ton Pierces had to be tied together with string so that they could run. The French in appreciation of the faithful work of the Reserve recommended it for decoration with the *Fourragère de la Croix de Guerre*, which American G. H. Q. refused to let us have.

## *CHAPTER I*

### TRAINING SCHOOL

**O**N June 30, 1917, the Buffalo Unit of the American Field Service set sail from New York to serve as an ammunition train with the French Armies. As the voyage over was entirely void of excitement it merits no description. Sufficient is it to state that we arrived safely in Bordeaux on July 10th, marched triumphantly from the dock to the railway station under a broiling hot July sun, froze almost to death the same night riding third class to Paris, and arrived at The American Field Service headquarters the next morning. Here we spent two days signing strange documents written in a language most of us did not understand, and in making the final preparations before going out to training school.

Late on the afternoon of Friday the 13th we reached Chavigny Farm, near Longpont, which was the training school for all Americans entering the motor transport service with the French Armies. Part of our company stayed here to train while the other half, for which there were not sufficient accommodations, was taken to the overflow school at Dommiers.

July 14th being the French National Holiday was a holiday for us since our French instructors were off celebrating, and we were, therefore, able to spend it in getting settled and exploring the neighborhood.

The following day we were started in on the 7 day a week schedule. There is no such thing as Sunday in the Army when an outfit is on active service. The schedule posted which we were to follow throughout our training read as follows:

6.00 a. m.	Reveille
6.55	Roll Call
7.00	Breakfast
7.30-8.00	Camp and Kitchen Police
8-9	Drill
9.15-11.15	Lecture, Greasing Trucks, etc.
11.30 a.m.-1.30 p.m.	Lunch
1.30-5.30	Driving Instruction
6.00	Supper
9.00	Taps

Drill was often quite amusing. Our parade ground was nothing more than a very uneven cow pasture with uncut grass. In addition to the natural hazards of the terrain all our commands were given in French. Anyone who has drilled knows that even under the most favorable circumstances it is no easy matter for beginners to execute correctly commands given in one's native tongue. You may well imagine then what tangles we managed to get into in our attempts to execute such commands as "*En ligne, face à gauche,*" and "*A droite par quatre,*" in that mountainous cow pasture. It was especially difficult for those who knew not "*gauche*" from "*droite.*"

Our hour of drill being over we went down to the farm for our morning lecture. Lieutenant Osteheimer, the officer in charge of the Dommiers camp, in these morning periods explained the nature of our work, rules of convoy, the care

of the trucks, French insignia and similar topics. The remaining time before lunch was spent oiling, greasing and cleaning the trucks.

All our instruction was on Pierce Arrow 5-ton trucks of which the Mallet Reserve was entirely composed. The Pierce Arrow Company may well be proud of the record that their trucks made in the war. The French considered them the best heavy truck of any they used and they have given them all a gruelling test.

The afternoons were spent in driving instruction. This consisted of practice convoys over the less frequented roads in the vicinity. The company was split up so that there were five to seven men on each of the trucks and during the course of the afternoon each man had two or three turns at the wheel. Nearly everyone in the company had driven some kind of a car back in the States and therefore it was only a question of adjusting one's self to the handling of a large and unwieldy truck.

During these afternoon runs we visited various points of interest. On July 22d we had our first glimpse of Soissons on our way up to see the old battlefields around Nouvron-Vingré where there had been some very stubborn fighting during the first Battle of the Aisne in February 1915.

We were all greatly interested in Soissons which, in spite of the damage inflicted upon it two years previously and its present proximity to the lines,\* contained many prosperous looking stores and a fair sized civilian population. The southwestern portion of the town was almost intact,

\*At this time Soissons was about seven miles from the lines which is within easy range of the large caliber guns. Its wartime population was seven hundred civilians as compared with a peacetime population of 14,300.

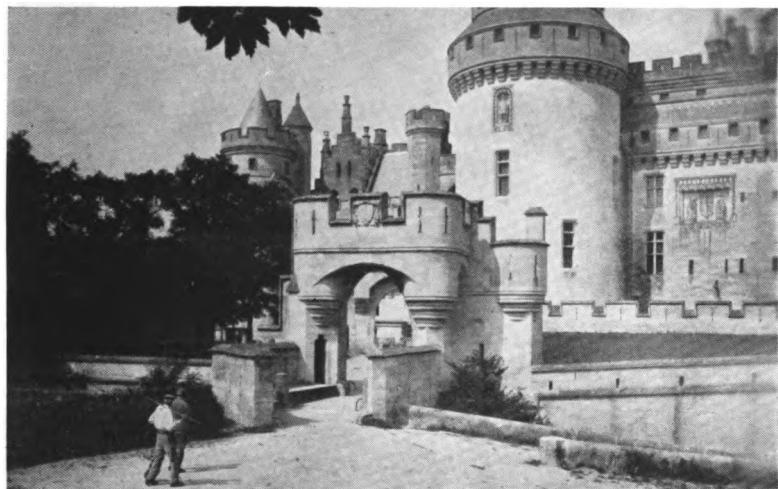
only an occasional house having been demolished by shelling, but as we neared the river the number of ruined houses greatly exceeded the number of those which were still habitable. In many cases the shells had effected strange damage to the structures. One house had only its front wall ripped off from top to bottom, all the furnishings standing just as they had been left. It gave the effect of a doll house whose front had been removed for the arranging of furniture. In the same street was a house with but three walls and a roof left, a hammock and some linen still hanging from the rafters of the attic. In a side street, which had been roped off as dangerous for traffic, a shell had hit a church steeple and turned it on its base so that it seemed as though the slightest breeze would send it crashing into the street below. On the north side of the river the destruction was nearly complete.

Nouvron-Vingré was flat on the ground and the surrounding fields a desolation of shell-holes criss-crossed with a bewildering maze of barbed wire entanglements and trenches. The Boches had made a small military cemetery here and had used as headstones those which had formerly been used in the little village cemetery. The French names had been obliterated and the German names chiseled on the reverse side.

The following afternoon we took a trip whose beauty offset the scenes of desolation of this excursion. We were allowed to wander through the massive Chateau Pierrefonds. This castle stands, pillow'd in foliage, on a hill above the small town which bears its name. It was built by Louis of Orleans in 1390 and was one of the handsomest and strongest fortresses of that period. An aged guide conducted us



**DOMMIERS TRAINING SCHOOL**



**PORTCULLIS OF CHATEAU PIERREFONDS**



through the small part of the chateau we had time to see. Inasmuch as all movable furnishings had been removed to a place of greater safety the rooms were quite bare.

We used to look forward to these rides with pleasant anticipation, even though the dust that rose in stifling clouds from the chalky roads and the jolting we received in the backs of the empty trucks made touring far from comfortable. Then too, our daily progress in learning how to manage our pet elephants gave us great encouragement and satisfaction.

On returning from convoys in the evening, hot and caked with dust, we repaired to an open air shower bath our predecessors had arranged in a little ravine not far from camp. France being a most informal country, we undressed in the barracks and without embarrassment pattered down the road to the shower clad only in a bath towel. This shower was a simple arrangement of a board chute and perforated lard pail through which the liquid ice drizzled. The effect of taking a shower in that water was similar to the effect of the mythical fountain in quest of which Ponce de Leon spent the best years of his life bathing in Florida.

Our two weeks of training ended on July 27th. That evening, as we were packing up in preparation for an early morning departure we heard for the first time the pulsating drone peculiar to the Boche bombing planes. A group of Goths passed over camp on their way to bomb Paris, and being neophytes in matters of war we were all quite thrilled and insisted on calling it an air raid even though there were no bombs dropped any nearer to us than Paris. This raid was the first which that city had suffered since 1915.



## *CHAPTER II*

### THE EARLY DAYS AT JOUAINES

**I**T was two o'clock in the afternoon—the hottest part of the day—when we arrived at Jouaignes. In contrast to the cool shade of the pine wood at Dommiers our new camp was situated on top of a bare hill with neither trees nor water within a quarter of a mile of us. Our living quarters consisted of eight *remorques* and a like number of tar paper shacks, all hot as ovens under the glare of the mid-day sun.

After unloading our baggage we were marched down to our commanding officer's headquarters where we paid him our respects by presenting arms and were given in return a short speech of welcome.

The following morning we were introduced to the trucks which we were to drive. According to the date on the plate attached to the dashboard the trucks had begun service in March 1915 and during their two years' participation in the war had been driven by their French drivers through the battles of Verdun and the Somme. They looked it. Some were minus mud-guards, some tail gates; all were caked with mud and very much in need of attention. One of the great drawbacks was that there were hardly any tools with which to make repairs. The only man who had a full complement of tools was the mechanic who was invariably busy elsewhere just at the time when you wanted him most.

All the trucks used by the French Armies have a groupe insignia by which one commander is able to distinguish his trucks readily from those of another while out on convoy. It may be argued that this is not as efficient as having a number. It is nevertheless picturesquely French. The section of trucks we were taking over had as their insignia a parrot; other groupes had rabbits, grenades, swallows, umbrellas, rhinoceros, clocks, monkeys, human figures, Statues of Liberty, etc. In addition to the groupe insignia each truck was marked with its company letter (or letter by which the company went) and numbered consecutively up to eighteen—there being eighteen trucks to a company.

It was not until our second day in camp that we received our first order for cars. We started soon after breakfast with a convoy of sixteen trucks to load ammunition at Fère-en-Tardenois.

It may be well to explain here the manner in which ammunition was handled. Shells for the "75s" came packed nine shells to a case and each truck normally carried fifty-two cases. The larger caliber shells were loaded singly and came unboxed. The powder for these was packed in hermetically sealed tin containers. The fuses or detonators, were boxed in small cases for easy handling.

A *corvée* of Boche prisoners loaded the shells, but the fuses, which can be set off by a hard blow, were loaded by Frenchmen. It was quite startling to a newcomer to see the rough way in which the shells were thrown about, but after we had seen a case of shells fall off a truck and be run over by the truck following without exploding we were quite at ease. When there was any cause for caution a great deal of care was displayed.

We were loaded shortly after lunch and set out for the shell-dump at Villers-en-Prayères on the south bank of the Aisne a short way from Fismes. A poplar grove afforded natural camouflage for the piles of cases. This park handled 75s only, and in addition to the large stream of ammunition which passed through daily there was a huge reserve supply which could be drawn on in case of emergency. The truck sections from Jouaignes supplied about ten thousand rounds per day to this one park from which a rough estimate may be made of how much ammunition is used per day on a fairly active front.

The fiasco offensive which the Crown Prince had been waging around Craonne and the Chemin des Dames seven kilometers away was just drawing to a close these last days of July and this park supplied a large part of the ammunition being used in the vicinity. The intensity of the fighting in that sector made Craonne come to be known as a second Verdun. The French repulsed assault after assault made by the Crown Prince's troops.

Noon the following day found us again on the road outside of this same park waiting for the French *corrée* to finish their luncheon and unload us. After we had finished our luncheon some of us walked down to the edge of the wood toward the front in search of excitement.

From the slope of the line of hills that rise on the north bank of the Aisne we could see the occasional spurt of flame from a French battery and now and again the black smoke-burst of a Boche arrivée.

Suddenly the whole crest and hillside less than a mile away seemed to be alive with little tongues of flame and the roar of the barrage that had just begun thundered up

and down and across the valley with an intensity a heavy thunderstorm only weakly approximates. In a few moments the black smoke-bursts of the German shells began to increase in number, adding their noise to the din, while now and again we could hear faintly above the thunder of the guns the piercing scream of shells which were searching out a big French battery half a mile away from us.

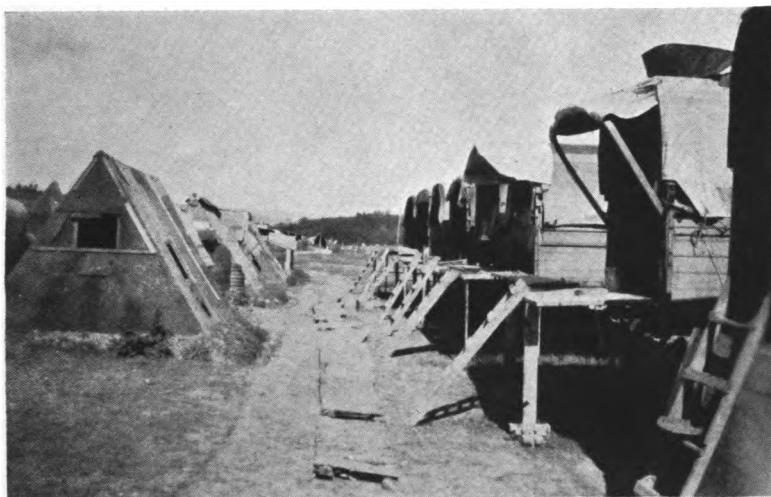
For two hours the ceaseless thunder of the cannonade reverberated back and forth and then ceased as suddenly as it had started, save for a few batteries which kept on plugging away at infrequent intervals.

Shortly after dawn on the morning of August 1st, the three of us in our remorque were awakened by the steady drip of rain on our cots. In disgust we climbed out of bed and went rummaging for tar paper which we were fortunate enough to find.

All day long the rain kept up softening the narrow road on which our trucks were parked to such an extent that passing up and down became more and more precarious. That night by the time our convoy, which had been out since early morning, returned, the ditches were bottomless bogs.

No form of automotive vehicle will skid on less provocation than a truck, and this slippery, high-crowned, narrow road with its long line of standing trucks, by which the returning convoy had to pass, was a natural hazard that would have baffled experienced drivers. To make a long story short it took the convoy just eight hours to make that final half mile to camp, the last car getting into its parking space just about breakfast time.

On August 3d our convoy crossed the Aisne loaded with



**SECTION M'S COMPANY STREET**



**IN TOWN—BARRACK IN FOREGROUND  
Camps at Jouaignes**



shells for the 75s and took them to a dump at Beaurieux, which was the nearest to the lines that convoys were allowed to go in the day time. The dump was up among the batteries we had seen in action from a distance a few days before and while we were unloading, a battery of 75s just behind us was shooting over the park at the trenches two miles away. If the Boche artillery was active at all at that time it was confining its fire closer to the front for we didn't hear even the whistle of a shell all morning.

During the next two weeks our work took a slump, there being little need for ammunition since the Crown Prince had given up hope of trying to break through on the Chemin des Dames. By the end of our third day in camp without any convoy work all the trucks had been thoroughly oiled, greased, repaired, and cleaned until nothing remained to be done to them. In an endeavor to keep the men busy our chef (company commander, not cook) strained his ingenuity to invent work, but camp chores are monotonous and unbearable when not absolutely necessary. The men saw that it was just a ruse to keep them out of mischief and therefore started to duck work and remain idle, and when men are idle, without work or play to hold their attention, discontent is certain to break out. By the end of the second week of this idling about camp everyone's disposition was badly bent and all were ready to jump at one another's throats on the slightest provocation.

Finally, on August 23d, we were set to the reasonable task of constructing a barrack to serve as our winter quarters. The new camp site was chosen in town at the foot of a pine covered hill. A week later the work was completed and we moved from our barren hilltop into the barrack, and

at the same time our work on the road was resumed with new vigor and dispositions were again smoothed out.

## *CHAPTER III*

### **PREPARATIONS FOR THE MALMAISON OFFENSIVE**

**D**URING the entire month of August we had noticed a great amount of aerial activity on both sides. Boche planes had frequently been as far back as our camp on scouting expeditions but were always kept at a great height by the French anti-aircraft batteries. One day a battery near camp made what appeared to be a direct hit on one of the planes, which fell fluttering like a leaf for a thousand feet or more before it straightened out and disappeared into a cloud.

The pursuit planes were busy too. One day while we were standing in line waiting for lunch we saw a Boche aviator drop out of a cloud and sink a French observation balloon. It is quite a thrilling sight to see one of these big sausage balloons burst into flame and fall to earth a smoking wreck. The observers make their escape by jumping with parachutes, but are sometimes overtaken in their descent and burned to death by the balloon or shot by the enemy aviator.

One evening, shortly after we moved into our new barrack we saw a German plane get three French balloons in less than a half a minute before they could be pulled down. The aviator dodged back into the clouds and made a safe escape.

"*Celles via Soissons.*" We made the trip so often during the latter part of August and September that we became thoroughly fed up with it.

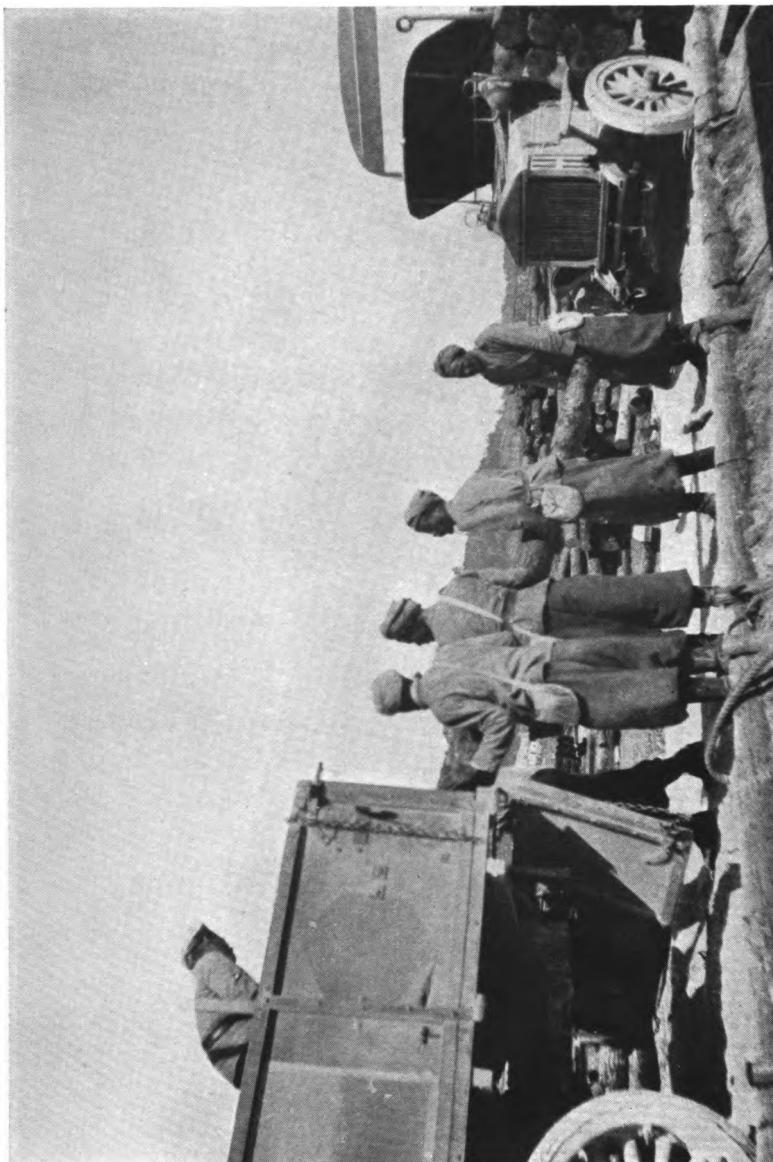
Orders to leave for this trip would rout us out of bed between three and five and after a scant breakfast of black coffee and bread the convoy rattled off in the dark of the chill dawn for the loading park at Bazoches. The *genie parc* there contained every conceivable article used in warfare: logs for making corduroy roads, lumber of all sizes, beams for dug-out galleries, duck-walks, corrugated iron, barbed-wire and stakes, wire-netting, tarpaper, nails, bolts, picks, shovels, coffins, in short everything the armies might need.

The loading was usually completed by lunch time and after eating that meal—lunch on convoy consisted of two sandwiches, one of jam and one of bully-beef or sardine—we set out for the advance depot at Celles-sur-Aisne, 35 kilometers\* away by our routing.

Because the French were enlarging the roadways across the floor of the Aisne valley and did not wish to attract the Boches' attention to the operations by allowing a lot of traffic to pass over them, we were routed over the much used highway to Soissons where we crossed the river and practically doubled back on our tracks for ten kilometers. The first time we made this trip all were very much interested in the German signs on the houses and the large amount of artillery in the vicinity, but after going over the route for the tenth time it became monotonous.

The last of August came the first news of the American Government's intentions of taking over the American Field Service and from then until the first of October we spent

\*Kilometer: equal to five-eighths of a mile: 8 kilometers = 5 miles.



CORVÉE OF FRENCH COLONIALS AT BAZOCHES



many hours debating whether or not we would enlist. Most of us reserved our decision until Captain Andrews came to Jouaignes on September 29th, and painted golden pictures of life in the American Army—the kind you see on recruiting posters—told us that we were to form the nucleus of the Motor Transport Corps of the Army and said how much we were needed in the offensive which we knew was not far off. What was to become of the men who did not enlist he was not quite sure but he hinted that all kinds of awful things might happen to them. We were told that those who wished to transfer later to another branch of the service would be allowed to do so; further, there were bright prospects of commissions for all dangled before us. When the fateful day of enlistment arrived most of the men signed up as buckprivates. The wise men held out and later joined the French artillery or aviation.

But to get back to the work we were doing during September: our duties and the activity we saw behind the lines all pointed to the fact that there was an attack imminent on the part of the French. That the Boches were aware that trouble was brewing was evidenced by their shelling the roads farther behind the lines than was their custom in the ordinary routine of war. On September 2d, while we were unloading trench mortar bombs at the Leury ammunition park shrapnel was breaking over a cross road a little farther on.

That night, shortly after the first snores had begun to be heard in the barrack, the drone of a motor heralded the approach of a bombing-plane. Nearly everyone used to pile out on such occasions to watch the fun and on account of the great distance a plane can be heard at night there was

always plenty of time to get on a few clothes. The plane this evening was flying very low and consequently was not heard until it was quite close. We were, therefore, only just out of the barrack door when it went roaring by overhead and at the same moment an anti-aircraft battery on the outskirts of town let go with a tracer shell which went blazing and screaming by a couple of hundred yards above us. A fire-cracker in a rabbit warren couldn't have caused more excitement. Everyone ducked for the nearest cover thinking that a bomb was about to alight in our midst. As we stumbled back into the dark barrack feeling for our bunks everyone was asking everyone else, "Who the hell started that stampede?"

From the day of our arrival at the front we had heard wild tales about trips to the ammunition dump at Chateau Soupir. It was not until September 4th that our Section received an order to go there. Twenty cars left camp after breakfast for the ammunition park at Bazoches to load trench mortar bombs. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when we crossed the Aisne at Oeuilly and turned to the left along the road following the north bank of the river.

Just beyond the battered little village of Bourg-et-Comin there is a break in the line of the hills to the north. A Boche observation balloon floated lazily in the sky all day long commanding an unobstructed view of about a kilometer of road so that during the daytime it was unsafe for anything but fast moving vehicles such as staff cars to pass. For this reason we stopped in Bourg and parking the cars behind what was left of the houses began a five hour wait until it should be dark enough to proceed.

Aeroplanes taking advantage of the clear, calm afternoon

were buzzing around in great numbers and as they circled back and forth the German anti-aircraft batteries were firing at them just closely enough to keep the aviators on their guard, changing their elevation and direction constantly.

At dusk we started on and after three-quarters of an hour of slow running turned off the main road through a narrow iron gateway into the grounds of the Chateau Soupir.

In the high brick wall surrounding the once beautiful grounds were huge gaps made by shells; shattered fragments of the white terra-cotta flower pots lay in the uncut grass beside their broken and overturned pedestals; in the distance the wrecked remains of the chateau glistened dimly in the moonlight and from a nearby grove came the crash of a French battery pounding away at the Germans.

The ammunition park was in another part of this wood and as we entered it we had to turn out around two shell holes which had been made a short time before our arrival.

Many of the convoys which unloaded here had had exciting times but by comparison to the wild tales we had heard about these trips our evening was a failure. We were unloaded without event and had a beautiful trip back to camp in the moonlight.

On Sunday, September 9th, there was held in the little old church of Jouaignes a service commemorating the victory at the Battle of the Marne. Most of the congregation consisted of women and children, all in mourning; the slight sprinkling of younger men were in uniform as were the priest, tenor soloist and organist. The simplicity of the expression of thanks to the Divine Providence which had turned defeat into Victory, so characteristic of the French, added greatly to the impressiveness of the service.

The following morning came a call for more *genie matériel* to be taken to Vailly. On the way over to Bazoches we were made to wear our gas masks for the practice of driving with them on. They were the clumsy old model used in the first days of gas warfare and smelled like a stale mixture of castor oil and iodoform. Those who obeyed orders nearly suffocated.

On the return trip occurred an accident which brings to mind one of the unsung heroes of the war—the motor-cycle dispatch rider, who, riding his flimsy machine over the roads behind the lines without lights, takes a big chance of being hit by any of the many vehicles which crowd the roads at night and stands about the smallest chance of getting out of such a collision undamaged. There is a great feeling of security when seated behind the wheel of a truck for there are very few vehicles on the road which wouldn't get the worst of a collision.

The night on which this accident occurred was moonless and black as pitch. Our staff car—a Ford—was passing through a wood when they heard a motor-cycle approaching. Having one of those inexplicable premonitions that they were going to have a collision the driver pulled over to his side of the road and was almost at a standstill when the motor-cycle crashed into them head on.

Investigation showed that neither the rider nor his cycle were injured. As he dusted himself off he apologized profusely for having run into them and assured our anxious lieutenant that he was quite accustomed to such experiences.

On September 16th our Section had its first mild taste of excitement. Two convoys were called out to take ammu-

tion to shell dumps along the Aisne. One of these was to take trench mortar bombs to Ferme St. Audebert a kilometer east of Vailly.

As usual we had to stop in the little wood a quarter of a mile from the bridge at Vailly and await darkness before venturing onto the exposed road leading to the bridge. Having parked our cars we went to the edge of the wood to see if there was any unusual activity going on. As we neared the open a shell came screaming down with a crash a few yards from the bridge and out from under the geyser of smoke and dirt came a French staff car evidently intent on being miles away when the next shell came in.

The shelling continued until dark and when it had ceased we started on. While we were unloading the gun took up its work again and in the quiet of the night the scream and burst of the shells sounded very close and very terrifying.

The other half of our convoy was unloading on the opposite side of the river and had rather an uncomfortable time. One of the shells fell fifty yards short of them and the next screamed over bursting an equal distance the other side of them. For the next few minutes they sat and wondered if the gunners were going to split the difference.

Each time we went out on convoy we witnessed the appearance of more ordnance and ammunition, new gun pits and shell dumps. Hospitals were being enlarged and new ones erected; large prison camps with barbed wire enclosures were erected; day and night the roads were crowded with loaded wagons and caissons moving toward the front and empty ones returning; batteries of all sizes appeared and on September 20th a shallow-draft gunboat anchored in the river near Celles. Five days later we saw two huge

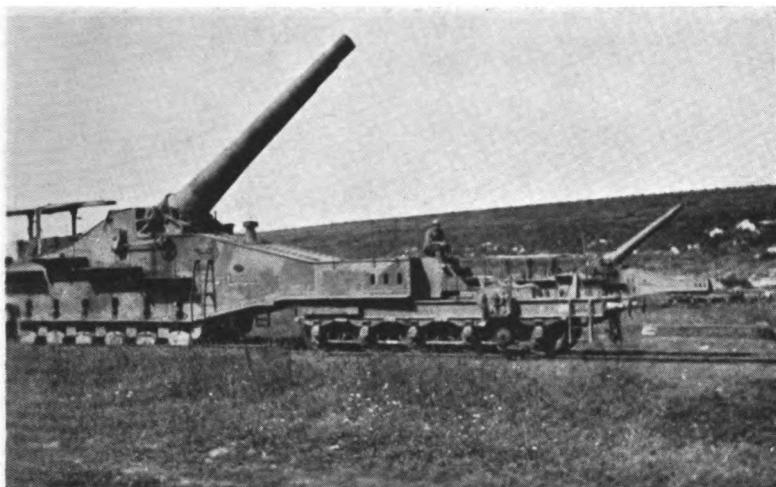
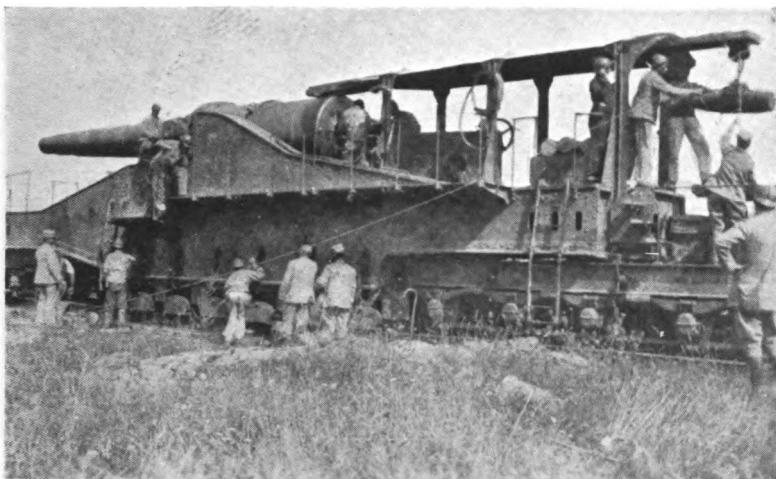
320mm rifles on special railway mountings, waiting at Bazoches.

Every day all available trucks were sent out on convoy carrying ammunition and trench material to the parks at Celles, Leury, Soupir, Chavonne and Vailly. We were greatly interested in the preparations being made and wondered how long it would be before the attack would start. From the magnitude of the preparations we thought that this coming attack would surely be the last fight of the war.

On October 1st we were enlisted in the American Army and two days later all of those who signed up were moved to the camp at Soissons. This camp was situated in "Le Mail," a park by the river just outside of town. The remorques, in each of which four men were crowded, formed a three sided hollow square in the shade of a grove of tall elm trees. There were also two barracks along the river bank in which other companies were quartered.

During the first weeks at Soissons our new regular army drill sergeant, a typical hard-boiled soldier of the old school tried to put us through a few manoeuvres and teach us the manual of arms, but we were doing so much work on the road that the few hours we did have in camp were needed to do the necessary work on the cars and the regular camp chores. On this account we did not learn much about executing squads east and west.

On October 9th, the big rifles we had seen at Bazoches appeared at Bucy-le-Long in very cleverly camouflaged positions. Spur tracks leading from the main line had been constructed and at the ends of these were the guns, each under a huge tent of artificial grass. The tracks for a hun-



**320MM RIFLES**



dred yards behind them were also concealed with this grass camouflage and fake bumpers erected to make the spurs look like sidings. To complete the effect several empty freight cars had been left standing on the tracks.

Shelling of points far behind the lines was now a common occurrence. On the fourteenth a shell screamed over our convoy and burst harmlessly between two piles of grenades in the park at Bucy a short distance from the road along which we were passing.

Shortly after breakfast on the morning of October 17th the first shell came sizzling down into Soissons, killing a poilu and two horses loading hay in the freight yard. All day long at five minute intervals these shells came screaming into town.

We came to know the gun trained on Soissons very well as the war progressed. It was a strange fact that the report of the gun could be heard very distinctly a short time before the shell began to whistle, giving everyone a second or two to duck for cover if necessary.

The damage as reported to us by a Frenchman that evening was, in addition to the poilu killed at the station, a direct hit on the least important of the three bridges over the Aisne at Soissons, the destruction of several unoccupied houses and five hits within a very short radius of the hospital.

That the suspense, which we all felt, was about to break, was further strengthened by an order from our headquarters that no town permissions were to be granted for a few days and that all were to carry gas masks and helmets with them all the while.



## *CHAPTER IV*

### **THE MALMAISON OFFENSIVE**

**October 18–31, 1917**

**T**HE sun disappeared behind threatening clouds early in the afternoon of Thursday, October 18, and night fell black as pitch with the feel of rain in the chill air. It was so cool that the four of us in our crowded little remorque either had on our coats or had turned in to keep warm.

At nine o'clock the silence of the earlier evening was suddenly broken by a heavy, rumbling thunder; the ground seemed to tremble and the reverberations of the cannonade made the canvas covering of our little shelter flap weirdly against the wooden frame-work. At intervals the deep-throated boom of the big rifles at Bucy sounded above the roar of the smaller and more distant guns.

Blowing out the candle we stepped outside. The low-hanging clouds to the north seemed to glow incandescently with the reflection of the flashes of the four thousand guns which had been massed for this attack.

The offensive for which we had been helping to prepare during the last three months had started, and the heaviest artillery preparation used in any offensive up to this time was thundering away less than a mile to the north and its intensity was so great that it seemed impossible to believe that anything could stand up against it.

Simultaneously with the opening of this attack a telegram was flashed from behind the German lines to the Austro-German front in Italy giving the signal which launched such a heavy attack against the Italians that the French had to send part of the troops they were counting on using in this attack to cooperate with the Italians in stopping the Austro-German counter-offensive. It was this scheme of the Boches which probably prevented the French from breaking through to Laon, which was their natural objective.

The firing continued heavily all that night. During the following day it let up but began again just as furiously after dark. For two days the German long range gun which had been trained on Soissons was silent.

Saturday night several of us managed to get permission to go into town for dinner. The little dining room at the Lion Rouge was filled as usual with a laughing crowd of American privates and French officers. About half way through dinner we heard above the talking and laughter the shriek of a shell followed by a distant explosion. "*La gare,*" whispered a French officer—simultaneously with the whistle of the shell the dining room had become silent.

Conversation was resumed but the laughing ceased and there was an atmosphere of nervous tension. Another crash followed a few minutes later, somewhat louder and closer than the first. Several of the guests left the tables and walked out to the entrance of the hotel abri in the little courtyard around which the hotel was built.

A third shell crashed down in the direction of the bridge. By this time the courtyard was full of civilians who had come from neighboring houses to take shelter in the big

abri under the hotel. All were talking excitedly. The guests who remained at the tables made a pretence at eating but looked rather uneasy. Two of the waitresses remained on duty, the other joining the *caissière* among the bottles and barrels in the combination wine-cellars-abri.

Two more shells came in, bursting in the direction of the river. The next one screamed over the hotel, bursting in the street behind, the concussion making the hotel rock and the silver on the tables jingle. A moment later the waitress announced that we could not have our after dinner *chocolat*, for the explosion of the last shell had knocked the soot down the chimney ruining the food on the stove and scaring the chef into the abri. We then adjourned to the parlor where one of our number played on the piano until the bombardment ceased half an hour later.

The only casualties in town that night occurred at the Pont des Anglais where one of the shells made a direct hit on a truck and trailer loaded with troops on their way to the front. Twenty-three of them were killed and the other seven badly wounded.

As each day passed we wondered how long before the infantry would attack. Our trucks were carrying ammunition daily to the various shell dumps in that sector. The officer in charge of the Leury park told us that 75,000 rounds passed through that park daily. I saw in the "Literary Digest" after the war an article stating that during the six days of artillery preparation there were used 6,000,000 rounds of 75mm shells alone. The figures for the other calibers I have forgotten, but they were proportionally staggering.

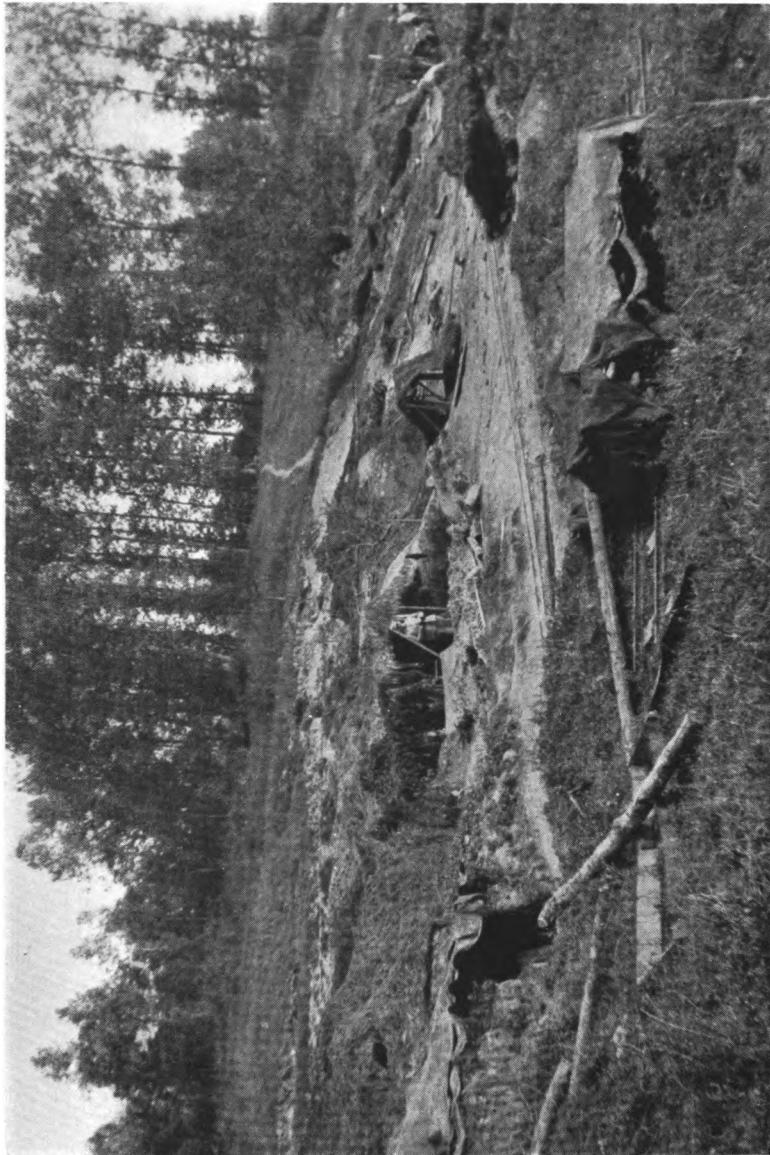
The infantry did not attack until dawn on Tuesday, October 23d. At eleven that morning the first prisoners came

through and all work in camp was stopped temporarily while we went up to watch them as they were marched back to the prison camp. They were covered with mud and were a very tired, dishevelled looking lot. For the most part their expressions were of haughty contempt, but here and there was a broad smile indicating that its owner was heartily glad to be alive and out of the fighting.

In addition to the long columns of prisoners that filed through there came also trucks and ambulances loaded with the wounded. On Wednesday a hospital boat tied up at the dock near our camp and many of us out of morbid curiosity went over to watch the transferring of the wounded from the ambulances to the boat.

As the doctor in charge called off their names from a roll each answered "*présent*," and hobbled or was led or carried aboard after being tagged with a card bearing his name and medical report. None of the men in this lot had body wounds. Some had their heads in bandages—one poor poilu probably doomed to go blind the rest of his life, was led aboard, his eyes covered with an ugly looking blood-soaked bandage; another walked aboard with his arm in a sling, its bandage covering the stump of a wrist. A wild-eyed Algerian, his face pale from loss of blood and tense with pain, answered weakly to his name and hobbled forward on crutches. His left trouser leg had been cut away just below the hip and revealed a leg wrapped its entire length in a bandage which still oozed blood. He pluckily tried to get aboard unaided but accidentally hit his wounded leg on the gang plank and fainted.

The papers each day were full of the success of the attack, giving the number of prisoners and cannon taken and



CAMOUFLAGED SHELL DUMP IN ADVANCE ZONE



the extent of the advance. At first we were very much elated, but as time went on and no calls came which took us up to the newly captured territory our hopes sank lower and we began to think that it wasn't such a big advance after all.

It was over by the first of November. On that day our convoy returned to camp after a shell haul by way of Soupir, Vailly, Celles and Bucy. The French were removing the greater part of their artillery from the Aisne and the roads were crowded with all sizes of cannon moving to the rear, the artillery which was remaining keeping up a very heavy fire.

The following day our company had its last convoy for three weeks, taking a detachment of machine gunners back from the front to a rest camp from which they were to go a few days later to the Italian Front.

During the following weeks we stayed in camp performing the thousand and one duties and jobs that our officers thought up with a view to keeping us out of mischief.

About this time the Y. M. C. A. started in Soissons and entertained us from time to time with movie shows, concerts and local talent in vaudeville sketches. One Sunday afternoon, which was declared a holiday by the Major, there was an impromptu football game among the companies of our group. As there were several players of no mean ability the game proved to be of real interest. The French population of Soissons came in large numbers to watch and returned to their homes that evening thoroughly convinced that Americans were crazy.

The bright spots in our otherwise dull existence were the evenings on which we could get town leave. The usual pro-

gram on such occasions was to leave camp as soon as possible after the day's work was done and go to the Public Bath House to indulge in the luxury of a tub of hot water.

The *Salles des Bains* had come in for its share of the bombardment in the earlier days of the war and at this time contained more ventilation facilities than had been provided for in the original plans of its architects. Bathing was, on that account, numbered with us as an outdoor sport.

The bath was merely an incidental on these trips. The real reason for going to town was to eat. There was little to complain about the food we were getting in camp, but a change was always welcome. There were two hotels open in Soissons at this time—the Lion Rouge and the Croix d'Or—both of which had excellent cuisines and (which mattered as much to us) china and silver, and someone else to wash the dishes. The management of the hotel we frequented finding us good customers adopted us. We always regard Soissons as our home in France.

## *CHAPTER V*

### THE MONTDIDIER TRIP

THE great convoy classic in the annals of the Reserve was the trip to Montdidier. There were other convoys later in the war which would have been remembered as classics if they had come to us as the Montdidier Trip did—the first real test of our physical endurance—but this has the priority over the others and therefore goes down in the history of the Reserve as *the* convoy.

On Monday night, November 19th, shortly after everyone was in bed and asleep we were routed out with orders to get the trucks ready for a two day convoy and then turn in with all our clothes on and be ready to roll on as short notice as possible.

At three-thirty the order came and an hour and a half later all the available trucks in the Reserve rattled out of camp in the chill dawn of the late autumn morning. Our French commander was in such a hurry to get us started that what breakfast we had—one bacon sandwich—was given us just as we left camp.

All morning long the convoy rumbled along from Soissons down through Chateau-Thierry and the Marne valley until about two o'clock we split up and went to various little towns in the vicinity of Meaux to pick up some French infantry regiments.

The entire Reserve, nearly six hundred cars strong, was

there loading with troops. It was, therefore, well into the afternoon by the time all the groupes were loaded and had taken their place in line. At five word was passed around that we were to eat—the first food since our bacon sandwich twelve hours previously. Visions of steak and french-fried potatoes vanished with the appearance of our evening meal—a can of cold salmon and half a loaf of bread to be divided between two men.

A few minutes later the convoy started on and the grind began. The rest of the trip remains in the minds of all as a nightmare and will not bear a detailed description because of the variety of experiences occurring.

At the time this convoy was made there was but one driver to each truck and every man, on this account, had to do all the driving alone.

As night fell a drizzling rain set in, greatly reducing the visibility of the roads and adding immensely to our personal discomfort. All night long the convoy bumped along over the slippery roads, many of the trucks sliding into ditches where they stayed until hauled out by the mechanic's car.

Dawn found us replenishing our fuel tanks with gas and oil by the roadside on the outskirts of Ham, and from here, without stopping for breakfast, we started on again through the desolate, rolling country across which a high wind was driving a penetrating, misty rain.

A little before noon we unloaded our troops in the vicinity of Peronne and without rest or food started out for Montdidier by a roundabout route.

At five that afternoon we stopped on top of one of the bleakest hills in France in the heart of the old Somme bat-

tlefield where the British had literally blasted their way through the German lines. Here we waited and shivered while our cooks prepared coffee and sandwiches.

Our next stop was at eight o'clock that night at Bray where we were given an hour and a half to rest. Here we learned the reason for our making this trip. On the morning of November 20th the British had made the well known attack at Cambrai in which tanks had been used in great numbers for the first time. The troops we had brought up were to help hold the ground which the British had captured. Bray was full of English cavalry who were waiting with saddles on for orders to go up.

At nine-thirty we were on the road again and from then until we pulled into Montdidier at five the next morning it was one continual battle against sleep. Every man had been driving almost continuously for two days and two nights and all were so tired and hungry—three meals such as we had had during those forty-nine hours were not enough to satisfy our appetites—that it was almost impossible to keep awake. A collection of the hallucinations and illusions of the various drivers during that second night would furnish a psychologist with much interesting material.

We reached the end of our journey at five o'clock on Thursday morning, November 22d, and after a brief two hours of sleep started to consolidate ourselves in our new camp. How long we were to be here our officers did not know, but they hinted that it might be all winter.

The afternoon of our arrival we were reinforced by a truck train of drafted men from the 26th Division and were thus insured against having to drive alone if another such emergency should arise.

During our five day sojourn in Montdidier we lived in the backs of our trucks and though we were constantly expecting to be called out on convoy there were but very few cars sent out.



HOW THE SIGN POST LOOKS AFTER 47 HOURS ON THE ROAD !

On the Tuesday following our arrival we were called out to transport troops from the front to a little town in the vicinity of Clermont and at nine-thirty that same evening we were back again in our old camp at Soissons.

## *CHAPTER VI*

### **WINTER AT SOISSONS**

**O**UR work during the winter months here at Soissons was too monotonous and dull to merit any detailed description, but there are certain phases of our camp life which cannot be forgotten.

Owing to a delay in our turkeys reaching us our Thanksgiving celebration was postponed till the day following, and even then a perfectly good holiday was ruined by the Reserve having to take part in a decoration ceremony. There was little we disliked more than having to get all dressed up and carry packs and guns around on parade.

This decoration ceremony was for the presentation of the *Medaille Militaire* to Bob Lamont, a member of the Reserve whose hand had been shot off while unloading under fire at the ammunition dump at Jouy early in the summer.

What convoys we went on were principally to carry trench material to a new park on the road to Laffaux, a town at the western end of the Chemin des Dames. Getting started on these early morning convoys was greatly complicated by the winter weather which had set in. Every night the water had to be drained from the cars and to refill these in the morning meant from five to seven trips between the trucks and the Aisne, our source of water supply, with a leaky canvas bucket. Doing this job in the chill dark morn many slipped on the steep bank leading down

to the river and, depending on their clumsiness, fell in up to their ankles, knees, waist or neck.

Furthermore it was a long and laborious job getting the motors started when they had been standing out all night with the thermometer well below freezing. Only one or two trucks in each company were equipped with storage batteries and it was, therefore, necessary to spin the others to get them started. To work the stiffness out of a motor in cold weather so that it can be spun by hand requires an hour of the most strenuous sort of labor.

On particularly cold nights—the average temperature was about 20° Fahrenheit, though it occasionally was as cold as two or three degrees below zero—the low grade gasoline, which often contained water, would freeze in the pipes and have to be thawed out by applications of rags soaked in hot water. On one of these cold mornings one of our brighter and more promising young mechanics tried to thaw out a frozen gas line with a blow torch. The charred remains of his experiment were put before the company as Exhibit A.

On December 10th a detachment of drafted men joined our ranks—the men from the 26th Division had left us soon after the Montdidier trip—and the day they arrived they were paid for the first time in four months. Being recruits from the “Toid Avenue and Toity-toid Street” district they all proceeded to get uproariously drunk in town that evening and raised such a row that for a while it seemed as though town leave would be taken away from all.

How the Reserve spent Christmas I do not know. I was on furlough with Scoles at the time and we had our Christmas dinner at the University Union in Paris where officers

and buck-privates forgot for the moment that they were in the Army and as college men gathered together around the tables of the Union without thought of rank to eat and drink and sing college songs. One of the brighter spots in the evening was furnished by the Yale delegation who had for this occasion adapted "Bright College Years" to the tune of the "Marseillaise." It brought down the house.

Our furlough was over December 30th and that evening we were back in the barracks, which by contrast with the luxuries of the Parisian hotels seemed more smelly, noisy and uninhabitable than ever. We were the last men from our outfit to go on furlough under the French system; at this time G. H. Q. started the leave centers for officers and enlisted men and from then on furloughs were prescribed rather than chosen.

The night following our return the old year went out and the new one came in with no blowing of whistles or tooting of tin horns.

The months of January and February were the two most uncomfortable and monotonous of the entire war as far as we were concerned. A company averaged one or two convoys per week, most of which were to uninteresting parks. The rest of our time was spent in camp doing the dull routine work which our officers strained their ingenuity to invent.

The day after a convoy was usually spent in working on the trucks, a job which was made the more unpleasant by reason either of the cold or the mud. Crawling around in the mud under the cars many of the men caught cold and then passed their ailment on to the men sleeping in the same barracks with them.

During November we had moved from our remorques into a large barrack which we had built for our winter quarters. This flimsy structure with its many cracks to leak wind and rain, had no other floor than the ground it was built on and was, therefore, very damp. The three tiny stoves, in spite of the fact that they were kept red-hot most of the day, had little effect on the general temperature.

At night the air in the barrack was vile. Those who slept near the doors and windows nearly froze to death whenever they were left open and consequently saw to it that they were kept closed. A door half open and three or four windows opened just a crack was all the ventilation there was for the hundred and twenty men sleeping in double-deckers set as close to each other as they could be and still leave room to pass between.

Failing other occupations to keep us busy we were made to crack rock to fill the many holes in the road on which our trucks were parked. Doing this work—an occupation given convicts at home—was most discouraging.

To describe camp and camp life without mentioning the army of dogs which attached itself to us would be to neglect my duty. At one time there were seventeen with us at Soissons only three of which had any visible owners. Every breed of dog in the universe was represented in these seventeen mongrels. A more nondescript collection of pups has never been gathered together. They overran the barracks and parade ground and were constantly getting into mischief in the one place and under our feet in the other.

The prize dog of them all was one of fox terrier and dachshund genealogy, who, on account of his general contour, was unanimously dubbed Eddie Belly Walrus. Eddie,

though still a puppy when we knew him, had once had a tail. Whoever amputated it had done such a thorough job that there was nothing left but an inch and a half of unwaggable skin, which had almost the consistency of rubber and therefore aroused in everyone an overwhelming desire to give it a pull. Even his canine playmates were attracted by it. After his first week in camp Eddie found that life was happiest for him when he was sitting down.

About the middle of January, after one of our drills during which we had had more than the usual amount of trouble keeping the dogs out of the way, an order was issued that all dogs save those who were definitely claimed by someone were to be disposed of. Who the dog-catcher was we never knew, but he was heartless. One evening Eddie didn't return to the barracks as was his custom and we knew that he had gone the way of the others. We mourned his loss.

Of all days in the week it was easiest to find men to take out a convoy on Saturday no matter what ungodly hour before dawn it was booked to leave. Saturday was inspection day and after the first inspection by Major Robinson we were glad of any excuse to get away from the camp.

The Major, who was subsequently promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, was a really military officer in every sense of the word. He had been schooled at West Point and was well equipped by training and experience in all departments of the game. In addition to that, there are few men who are so richly endowed with the gift of striking fear and respect into the hearts of their subordinates as the Major. To hear him really bawl a man out was an education in itself.

It took us a week to get over the effect of one inspection and ready for the next.

During the night of January 28th came the first of a long series of air raids which were to disturb our sleep during the following nights. Our record week was six nights out of seven.

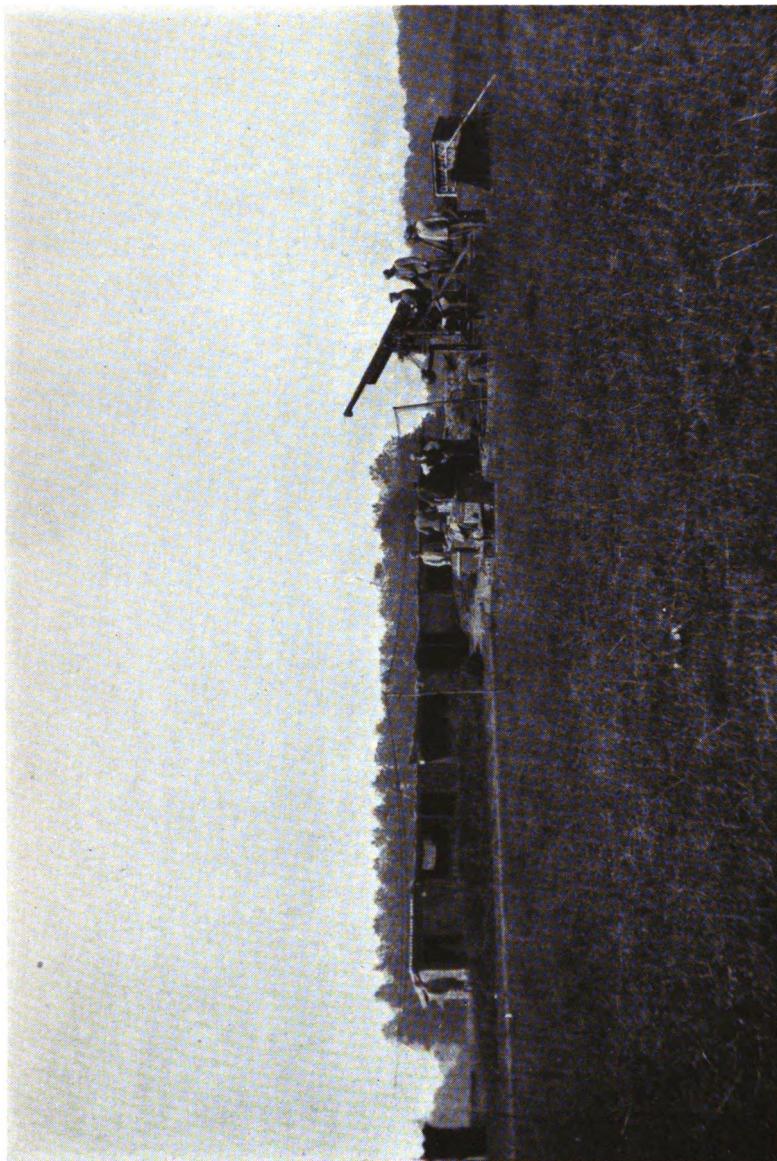
The barracks in which we lived were situated between an anti-aircraft battery of two 75's, which we dubbed "The Twins," and a huge searchlight. On account of our location—the guns were about two hundred yards away and the searchlight a hundred yards—we always knew when a plane came over.

On this evening the French were evidently expecting a raid, for in addition to the Twins there were two machine-gun crews in the field near our barracks.

A few minutes before ten the far off throbbing drone, characteristic of the German bombers, broke in on the quiet of a perfectly beautiful moonlight night. A moment later the motor generator of the searchlight started and the long finger of light began to sweep back and forth across the sky. In the direction from which the plane was coming five or six other searchlights were vainly trying to outshine the moon and spot the plane, while tracer shells and shrapnel from all the anti-aircraft batteries in the vicinity streamed skyward.

Suddenly the Twins opened up, firing just as fast as they could, and were soon joined by the two machine-guns blindly pouring their stream of lead up into the sky.

Abruptly the motor of the plane ceased as it coasted silently down to a more effective range to drop its bombs. The Twins, aimed at night by an instrument which detects



ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY AT CHASSEMY



from the noise of the motor the direction of the plane, ceased firing for lack of something to aim at and a little later the searchlight closed its shutters and waited for the plane to turn on its motor again. During the summer a plane had coasted silently down and nearly wiped out the searchlight crew.

After what seemed an interminable time, during which we stood gaping skyward, straining our ears for the sound of the plane, the roar of the motor suddenly broke forth very close and very low. Simultaneously the Twins and the machine-guns opened fire with renewed ardor and in the direction of the bridge, less than three hundred yards away six bombs crashed down in rapid succession with a livid red flash and an explosion which momentarily drowned out the racket the anti-aircraft batteries were making.

The marauder circled over town and once more made an attempt to hit the bridge, the batteries pouring forth a stream of shells all the while; and then, having dropped its bombs it winged its way back to Germany and we started back to the barracks and sleep. Half an hour later there was another, though less noisy raid.

None of the bombs had scored a hit on the bridge. The only one that took a life, hit the *Cantine des Dames* just across the river from us, killing the woman in charge and setting fire to the building.

There were many nights when these raids were nothing but false alarms as far as we were concerned. Whenever there was a raid on Paris, Compiegne, Meaux or any other town to the south of us, the planes always passed over Soissons. So between the Twins barking up until midnight or after and the noise of one of the four companies who

shared the barracks going out on convoy in the early hours before dawn there were many times when we longed for an undisturbed night of rest.

On February 2d the 101st Field Artillery went through Soissons on its way to the front. This was one of the first American artillery units to get into action and one of the few American outfits for which we ever hauled. Two days later several of our trucks were sent to haul feed and Q. M. C. supplies for them at Missy-Conde.

For the most part these winter convoys were quite devoid of interest and excitement. About the middle of February, however, we became aware that there was something afoot. Our convoys with trench material were all to parks in the general vicinity of Coucy-le-Chateau in the Aisne-Oise sector to the northwest of Soissons. The towns through which we passed were occupied by Italian troops engaged in the construction of trenches, barbed wire entanglements and abris. It seemed incredible to us that the French were preparing to fall back before the Germans and yet it was evident that they were making extensive preparations for a defense. This was the first indication we had of the approaching German offensive.

One beautiful Sunday afternoon while we were loading in the ammunition park at Bucy our attention was suddenly attracted skyward by the faint popping of anti-aircraft shrapnel breaking high overhead. There, fifteen thousand feet above us, were three French Spads after one German observation plane, all so high that they could hardly be distinguished from one another.

All work in the park stopped momentarily while we watched the progress of the battle.

The German plane being too slow to escape its pursuers dodged back and forth putting up a running battle with each of them successively. As we watched he dove headlong for the earth, the three Frenchmen following him down firing at him all the while.

Suddenly there was a burst of smoke from the Boche plane, the wings ripped loose from the fusilage and the machine was torn into a hundred pieces which were fluttering to earth for the next fifteen or twenty minutes. The fusilage, containing the pilot, observer and engine fell the distance in a little more than a minute, landing by the roadside about half a mile from the park.

From all over the country side the spectators of this battle flocked to see the wrecked machine and to gather souvenirs from the debris.

In addition to the day's work there was much of interest and pleasure connected with our winter at Soissons. The "Y" did its best to keep us amused with movies and entertainments of one kind or another. And then, too, there were delightful places to go to eat when we had town leave.

One of the pleasantest of these little restaurants was in a side street just off the main square. The proprietress was a well-born woman who before the war had sung in the cathedral. She had a grand piano in her salon and occasionally, when the crowd was small enough so that her services were not required in the kitchen, she would play and sing for us.

One of the matters of greatest interest and concern in our lives was the question of transfers. When we had changed over from the Field Service to the Army we had

been told that if we did not like the motor transport service we could transfer later to another branch of the service. We were innocent enough at that time to believe this was the truth!

By March nearly every member in the outfit was so fed up with trucking that there were applications on file at headquarters which would, if they had gone through, have transferred the entire outfit into other branches.

Night and day little groups could be seen with their heads together comparing notes and computing chances of transfer. Nearly everyone had a cousin or an aunt who knew someone who knew somebody else who might be of influence in bringing about his transfer and was pinning his hopes of escape on the chance that this 'pull' might be worked. It was hopeless.

Three or four of the transfers did go through and, if my informant is correct, those men, whom we considered so lucky, later wished they were back with us again. From the time they left us they did trucking for the artillery, or whatever branch they had transferred to, in the S. O. S.

And thus the winter wore on and with the coming of milder weather the mud thawed out and it started to rain again.

## *CHAPTER VII*

### **THE FIRST GERMAN OFFENSIVE**

**March 21, 1918**

**W**ITH the approach of Spring it became more and more evident that something was stirring up there behind the line of hills to the north. In addition to the preparations for an impending defensive which we had seen while out on convoy there was an occurrence in camp which indicated that some great activity on the part of the Germans was imminent. One day a party of French artillery officers visited camp in company with our Major to inspect the old trenches and dugouts in that vicinity and a few days later we were set to work constructing a large sized abri.

About the middle of March the weather cleared up and at the same time our activity began to increase. A series of fine nights made air raids possible and on the night of March 11th six groups of planes passed over us on their way in and out from Paris. During one of the twelve spasms of spitting their hate up into the sky the Twins scored a hit and brought down one of the marauders. The plane landed upside down in a field on top of Leury hill and either caught fire or was fired by the aviators who had, by some miracle, escaped being killed.

The raids on Paris that night were the most disastrous of the war. One of the bombs scored a direct hit on a Metro

(subway) station in which several hundred people had taken refuge. The papers reported that one hundred people were killed and seventy-nine wounded.

During the morning of March 21st an "alert"—an order to be all ready to leave on a moment's notice—was received and the entire group sent out to the trucks to make sure that everything was in readiness to be gone on the road for two days.

In the midst of this work the howitzer, which had shelled Soissons from time to time, started in firing more rapidly than ever before. Instead of its usual five minute interval—the German artillerymen fire on a regularly timed schedule, which is much more convenient for those on the receiving end than random firing—the gun was pumping them over at the rate of one shot a minute.

At first the shelling was concentrated on the roads leading in to town from the front. Then three or four landed in the Place de Laon just across the river, after which several screamed all the way over town bursting in the railroad yards.

Then the gunners shortened their range and the next shell sent up a shower of earth and rocks at the near end of the Pont des Peniches less than fifty yards from the head of our line of trucks. Everyone in the vicinity ducked under a truck while the pebbles came rattling back to earth. Two more came crashing down near the other end of the bridge, another burst in the river and the fourth missed the bridge by fifty yards knocking the side out of a house facing the river. They were hitting so close that every time we heard the gun go off we ducked, for in addition to the showers of rock each one scattered around, the pieces of *éclat*

were clipping twigs and branches off the neighboring trees.

What happened in the next few seconds I remember only as one remembers a vivid nightmare. I heard the gun and as I started to duck I was knocked flat by a blast that seemed to blister the universe. For a second or two the world went black and as the darkness lifted everyone in the vicinity was slowly picking themselves up—all but one who lay writhing in the dust holding on to his leg and calling out with pain. A shell fragment had passed entirely through Knockenhauer's leg, breaking the femur mid-way between his hip and knee and leaving a nasty bleeding wound.

Before those who were in the immediate vicinity were able to collect their dazed wits enough to assist the wounded man, Lieutenant Browning came running up, whipped off his belt and made a tourniquet to stop the bleeding, sent after his staff car and soon had Knockenhauer on the way to the hospital.

The shell had hit a tree beside the last truck, bursting twenty feet in the air and scattering over the ten or fifteen men in the vicinity. Fortunately the drivers of the last three trucks had returned to the barracks. How it was that those who were in the immediate vicinity escaped with only the one casualty, and that not fatal, will ever remain a mystery.

All day long the firing kept up, but only two more shells seemed to have been aimed at the camp. Both of these came in at supper time. The first lit in a field across the river doing no harm, and the second burst harmlessly in the middle of the river less than thirty yards from two of our lieutenants.

It was evident that the artillery preparation for the attack had begun, for from the northwest came the continuous thunder of the cannonade.

The following day orders were received to evacuate camp and early that morning we moved out by the roadside on the main highway from Soissons to Villers-Cotterets just outside of town, leaving our old camp with nothing in it but our heavy baggage and four or five men to guard it.

The papers reported a herculean attempt by the Boches to gain a decision before America could become a real factor in the war. The fight was on and in the face of it the morale and discipline of our outfit became perfect. Everyone was on their toes and orders were executed quickly and without complaining.

On March 23d convoys were called out from the groupes to transport several batteries of field artillery. At five that afternoon the convoy pulled up by the roadside on the outskirts of Noyon and waited until midnight before orders were finally received concerning where the guns were to be taken.

Four hours later, after a slow journey over the congested roads, we reached Guiscard. On all sides of this town the French artillery was blazing away in their efforts to stop the Germans who had already in two days of fighting penetrated at the juncture of the English and the French Armies to a depth of fifteen miles.

There were positions already prepared for the 75s we were carrying. The guns were hauled out of the trucks and before the convoy had pulled out on its way back to camp they, too, had started in firing.

We left them at four-thirty and two hours and a half later

the gunners, having no means of removing their batteries, blew up the guns and retreated before the advancing Huns.

During our absence the men in camp had also seen a bit of excitement. The howitzer had been busy with Soissons all day long and had paid a bit of attention to the camp we had evacuated the previous morning. One of the mess halls had been hit; two or three shells had burst along the road on which our trucks had been parked; and another had hit almost on top of the new abri we had constructed.

Another interesting bit of news was the report in the papers of a new cannon monstrosity with which the Germans were shelling Paris from the Forest of St. Gobain—an incredible distance of seventy-five miles.

Two days later the Reserve made the trip which was later characterized by one of our enthusiastic press agents as a convoy in which "troops were borne to the very rim of battle." We picked up a regiment of French infantry at Maizy with instructions to take them to Noyon. At four that afternoon the convoy toiled up the hill above Vic-sur-Aisne and started out across the plateau toward Noyon. We hadn't gone but a few kilometers before a French officer came tearing down the road from Noyon in his staff car and stopped the convoy where it was, saying that the Boche were already in that town and it was expedient for us to get off the plateau and out of sight in the valley below "very damn queek!"

An order received during the night of March 28th illustrates how much on its toes the Reserve was at this time. At midnight an order came for all available trucks to go out at once. Ten minutes later the convoy rolled out of camp. In that short space of time the trucks to go had been

selected, the men called, beds slung—we were sleeping in the backs of the trucks at this time—the cooks had given the men coffee to drink and rations to eat on the road, and the companies had lined up in their proper order.

That afternoon one hundred men from the Reserve were sent down to the Base Depot of the *Service Automobiles* at Versailles to bring out new trucks. They were gone on this trip three rainy days and nights and arrived back in camp on Easter Sunday fagged out with twenty-eight hours steady driving on the way back.

It was on this same day, March 31st, the announcement appeared in the papers that General Foch was to have the supreme command of all the Allied Armies on the Western Front. The news put confidence of ultimate victory in the hearts of all.

The next morning at roll call the lieutenant after complimenting us on the work we had been doing during the past two weeks read us the following *Décision*. This corresponds to the General Orders of the American Army. If you have ever read a G. O. you will appreciate the simplicity and appeal of the following and will perhaps understand why it was that the French would not be beaten at the Marne or Verdun.

27 Mars, 1918.

GRAND QUARTIER GENERAL.  
DECISION No. 104.

The enemy has hurled himself upon us in a supreme effort. He is trying to separate us from the English in order to throw open the road to Paris. At all cost he must be stopped.

Keep your ground: hold firm.

Your comrades are coming; united we will hurl ourselves upon the invader.

Soldiers of the Marne, of the Yser, of Verdun, I appeal to you! The fate of France hangs in the balance!

A few days later it was rumored that we were to move from our roadside camp to more permanent billets farther back.



## *CHAPTER VIII*

### VILLERS-HELON

ON Sunday, April 7th, we moved to one of the pleasantest camps we occupied during our sojourn in France. The little town of Villers-Helon is off the beaten track ten kilometers south of Soissons and like many villages of France consists of one small chateau and a group of farm buildings, peasants' houses, a few stores and a buvette all bordering on the one street.

The chateau was occupied by a crabbed old general of the War of 1870, who was the village tyrant. Every time he saw a peasant, who wasn't working for him, on his property or near it he would fly into a rage and anathematize him at great length and considerable detail.

The villagers themselves were about as cordial and pleasant as one could possibly wish for and as far as I know there were no strained international relations while we were there, such as had so often occurred.

The town was overflowing with a lively band of youngsters who besieged the camp daily in quest of *chocolat*, *biscuits* and "*blacjacque*," which was the urchins' terminology for all brands of chewing-gum.

However, life here was by no means one sweet song. The bitter was mixed with the sweet. A change of French officers, decidedly for the worse, together with the news that no more transfers would be granted, gave us plenty of ma-

terial to complain about. While here at Villers-Helon we took one of the longest and hardest convoys of our experience. This was the so-called "Chalons trip," which occupied Saturday, Sunday and Monday, April 13-15th.

Starting at half past six Saturday morning we went to towns along the Aisne above Vic to pick up a regiment of infantry which was to be taken back *en repos*. We drove all that day and all that night, stopping only to replenish our fuel supply, and at dawn came to Vitry-le-Francois where the troops disembarked.

Immediately after dropping them we started on and at nine reached the outskirts of Vanault-les-Dames where the convoy halted for three hours for breakfast and a rest. The breakfast was quite simple. Before we left camp each man had been issued four sandwiches and a can of beans to last him for three days. Most of us were holding the beans in reserve and therefore breakfasted heartily on one dust-covered corn beef sandwich and water from a neighboring farmyard. For the remainder of the three hours we curled up in our blankets on the grass by the roadside and slept as much as passing traffic and inquisitive bugs would allow.

At noon we were on the road again and late that afternoon picked up more infantry at Vertus. These were fresh troops who were to be transported to Choisy-au-Bac from which point they would go into action.

The second night on the road was a repetition of the second night on the Montdidier trip—all were so tired they could hardly sit up at the wheel.

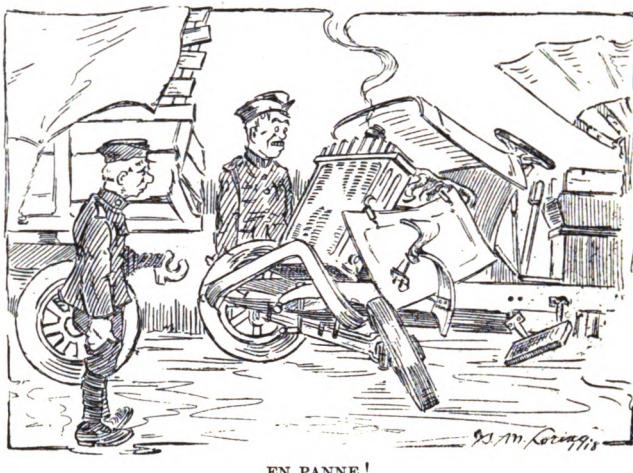
Two questions are often asked in connection with these long night trips. The one that is most frequently asked is,

"How can you see the road driving at night without any lights?"

On clear nights there was enough light radiated by the stars to see the outline of a dusty road against the darker background of the grass, but on rainy nights it was very difficult to see and often the driving meant actually feeling your way along the road—French roads are usually high-crowned and it was possible to tell by the feel of the truck under you whether you were too close to the ditch. Then too, many of the highways of France are bordered by rows of poplars and it was possible to tell from the narrow strip of sky overhead where the road was. It must be remembered that at night the speed of a convoy was rarely over ten miles an hour, which is slow enough to make it possible to come to a stop usually before getting into trouble. Seeing the truck ahead on either a rainy or dusty night was one of our greatest difficulties. Often a truck, which had fallen behind the rest of the convoy, and was hurrying to catch up, would run into the rear end of the car ahead in the dust and darkness. These collisions meant smashed radiators and a truck to tow back to camp.

It has also been asked if it is really possible for a man to drive in his sleep. Of course it is not possible for a man to guide a car when he is in the ordinary relaxed sleeping condition. Many a man has fallen asleep while driving only to be waked up a second later by the jolt of his car hitting a curb or running headlong into a ditch. But it is possible to drive and yet be unconscious of doing it. Two incidents will illustrate this point, though they leave unexplained how it is that you can stay on the road and yet be totally unconscious of anything on it. One of these incidents oc-

curred to me during the second night of the Chalons trip. I distinctly remember passing through La Ferte Milon in the dark. Just after leaving this town I evidently fell into that semi-conscious state for I can only remember following the dark shadow of the car ahead for what seemed to



EN PANNE!

be about five minutes. Suddenly I "came to." The darkness and the car ahead were merely an illusion and it was then broad daylight. The convoy was not in sight. I had been driving for three-quarters of an hour following an imaginary car during which time the convoy had gone out of sight and dawn had come.

The second incident is along the same line as my experience. A convoy had stopped in the twilight of the early dawn to wait for one of the cars, which had dropped behind, to catch up. After a few moments we saw the car approaching. The driver was in this same semi-conscious state and though he was keeping the truck on the road he

saw nothing on it and ran, full power on, into the rear end of the last truck of the halted convoy. It was a most ridiculous sight for it was so light that we could see him coming for fifty yards or more and thought of course that he saw the standing line of trucks and would come to a halt. Until the force of the impact woke him up he thought he was following along with the rest of the convoy.

Incidents of this kind occurred too often in our experience to be refuted or called impossible.

The convoy, with its load of troops, rattled along all night long and shortly after dawn stopped on the road near Pierrefonds for breakfast. This meal—stew—had been sent out to us the night before from camp supposedly for supper and was, on account of its long absence from the stove, only lukewarm; but we were all so hungry after our long hours of work in the cold and wet—it was only a little above freezing and had been raining much of the time—that no one questioned the propriety of lukewarm stew for breakfast.

After this strength restoring repast we again proceeded on our way and a little later came to Choisy-au-Bac, our destination. Here for the first time on our long trip we felt that we were in the war again, for until approaching that town we had not heard a shot.

It was welcome news when word was given to head for camp and thither we went, arriving shortly before lunch. During the fifty-two hours we had been gone we had covered approximately 450 kilometers as against the 300 kilometers covered on the trip to Montdidier.

During the next few days, which we spent in camp, we picked up a little news with regard to the progress of the

fighting. The Germans had penetrated at the juncture of the English and the French lines to a maximum depth of fifty kilometers and had captured thousands of prisoners and a large quantity of cannon and stores. They had been halted but the situation was serious.

Of special interest to us was the news from Soissons. The town had been under bombardment almost continuously since the day we had been shelled out of camp. One of the shells had hit the Lion Rouge Hotel wounding the chef and one of the waitresses. Another had burst in the courtyard of the house in which our Q.M.C. supplies were stored, blowing in the windows and making things most uncomfortable for the men in charge.

Two more convoys at the end of April carrying a trench mortar battery and ammunition to the east side of the pocket the Germans had made in this first drive showed that activity had not entirely ceased in that sector.

The first three weeks in May was, for us at least, the lull between the storms. We spent most of the time in camp doing the usual routine work. The monotony was relieved occasionally by entertainments given by the "Y" and also we had two very superior concerts by French military bands.

Some of the men took advantage of this period of inactivity to go over to the Lafayette Esquadille hangar at Chaudun and fraternize with the aviators. Several were given rides and even taken out over the lines.

Our pleasant sojourn in the smiling village of Villers-Helon came to an abrupt end during the last week in May. For several days the papers had been reporting that the Boches were massing their forces for another attack and on May 26th the thunder of the artillery preparation broke



FLYING FIELD AT CHAUDUN



out on the front immediately north of us. The same day we were told to be on the alert for any orders that might come and also to be ready to break camp. An order was also given to the townspeople to be ready to evacuate at any time.

In the face of these ominous orders the baseball game and sports we were planning for Decoration Day were quickly forgotten and everyone settled down to work.



## *CHAPTER IX*

### THE GREAT RETREAT

THE second of the great German drives started on May 26th. That night a convoy was called out to move a French regimental headquarters up to Couvrelles and in the execution of this order they ran through the back edge of the gas cloud which the Boches had put over. The gas extended as far back as Berzy, which was nearly 20 kilometers from the front.

The following evening at nine came an order for sixty cars from the groupe which were on the road five minutes later. Our orders were to evacuate the headquarters and baggage of the Sixth Army from Soissons for the town was doomed and everyone but the troops actually engaged in the fighting was leaving. The last few civilians, who had lived there during the past month of almost continuous shelling, now came and besought us to let them bring such worldly goods as they could and go away with us in our trucks, but these were so loaded with the army impedimenta that there was no room for anything else.

During the loading shells were slamming into town at short intervals. Most of them were directed at the station three or four blocks away; others fell in the vicinity of the bridges on the other side of town; and still others whined overhead on their way to the railroad junction outside of the city.

Shortly before dawn we were loaded and left Soissons for Oulchy where the headquarters division was to be taken. The roads were crowded with troops going up into action and with refugees fleeing before the advancing Germans.

During the afternoon a convoy from Groupes Robinson and Bernhart came out of a bad situation very fortunately. The road over which they were returning to camp was crowded with a French artillery train on its way to the front. Suddenly ten or fifteen Boche planes dropped down out of the sky and swept up and down the road raking it with their machine-guns. The artillery suffered badly losing a number of horses and men, whereas the convoy came through practically unscathed. Several of the trucks had bullet holes in them but only one man, Jimmy Means, had been hit, and he only slightly grazed by one of the bullets.

Just as we were about to turn in that night orders were received to break camp and clear out as the Boches were coming. We worked all night packing up and as we pulled out of town at dawn a battery of 75s in the orchard behind the chateau started in firing, whereby we knew that the Germans were not far distant.

The trucks with the camp baggage went on to our new camp and the others went to pick up the Sixth Army headquarters at Oulchy where we had left them the day before. The Germans were expected in that town in another 24 hours. We left the headquarters company in Trilport at ten that evening and then on this, our third night without sleep started out to find camp. We rejoined the rest of our outfit at four that morning at Dhuisy and being too sleepy to bother looking for our various companies turned in where we stopped. It was then Thursday morning and we had

been on continuous duty since six o'clock Monday morning —I believe this stretch of 70 hours without sleep was the record of the Reserve.

The next afternoon word was received that the Germans were advancing so rapidly that the authorities deemed Dhuisy to be an unhealthy place for us to remain any longer and therefore we packed up and started for the rear again.

Our stop for the night was made in the beautiful little town of Jaignes.

The following day two very interesting convoys went out from camp. The first carried a load of shells for the 75s to a fork in the road between Licy and the now famous Belleau. It was a busy spot that afternoon. The French were retreating too rapidly to use established shell dumps; the ammunition was taken up as far as it was deemed safe for a truck to go and then transferred directly to the caissons.

In addition to being a loading point for the caissons this fork in the road was the advance station where the wounded walked or were carried out to the waiting ambulances.

During our unloading a regiment of infantry came out. They had been fighting a losing battle for two and a half days and were thoroughly worn out and very discouraged. In the action they had lost two hundred men. They told us that two Germans seemed to spring up wherever one was killed.

Just as we finished unloading and started for home the Boches began to shell the road but by the time they had missed it with their second shot we were scuttling home as fast as the trucks would go, and when the third shell slammed in we were almost too far away to hear its explosion

above the roar and rattle of the trucks. It was on this evening, May 31st, that we first saw American troops in any great numbers. On the way back to camp we passed the Second Division infantry being taken in trucks to the sector near Chateau-Thierry.

A second convoy leaving camp later that same day had one of the most nerve-racking experiences in the history of the Reserve. They had just finished loading ammunition at the depot of Crepy-en-Valois and had started for their unloading point when a Boche bombing squadron arrived on the scene—it was then ten in the evening. Circling over the park and the departing convoy the planes dropped magnesium flares of such great brilliancy the countryside for miles around was illuminated so that everything was plainly visible, and then the aviators proceeded to bomb and machine-gun their objectives under the most favorable circumstances.

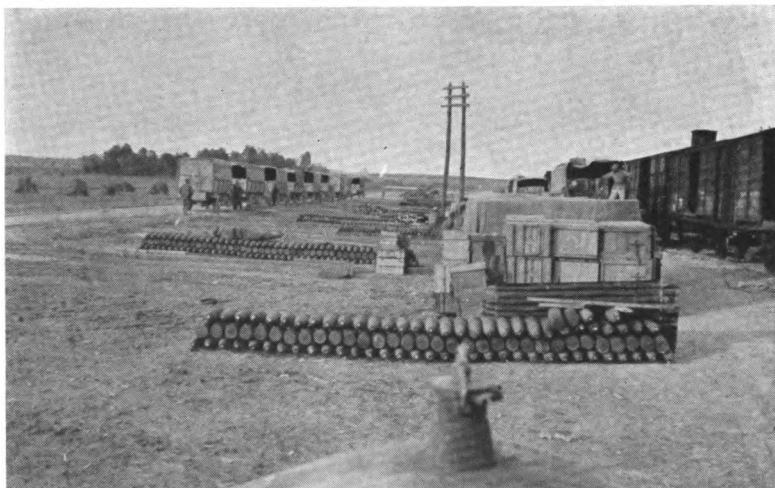
The ammunition in the park was ignited by the bombs and in a few moments things became so hot for the convoy, which was then on an exposed road, that the men had to abandon the trucks and take cover in the field. Fortunately neither the bombing nor machine-gunning took any toll, and there were no casualties to trucks or drivers.

We started on the last step of our great retreat at half past three the following morning—June 1st. This took us to Barcy, a most uninteresting and unsavory village seven kilometers due north of Meaux.

One would think that after the way the battle had been going since the Germans launched their series of attacks beginning the middle of March, everyone would be feeling very pessimistic about the war. Our fifty kilometer re-



CAMP AT CROSSROADS, BARCY



LOADING PARK



treat was not a source of rejoicing by any means, but since the Germans had been stopped everyone was confident in ultimate victory. The Central Empires had made a colossal effort to gain a decisive victory and had failed. Every day the Americans were pouring into the battle line in ever increasing numbers and the effect upon everyone was electric—the balance of power was tipping decisively against the Boches. The optimists were predicting the war would be over in two months.



## *CHAPTER X*

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE

July 18, 1918.

OUR memories of Bancy are not altogether the pleasantest for it left a great deal to be desired as a billet. The water supply came from a hand pump of a well sunk in the middle of a particularly foul barnyard, and in addition to having a most unappetizing flavor it was actually so hard that soap would not lather—and to those who have had to shave a long neglected beard with cold water and a dull razor this last feature concerning the water may be significant.

Our kitchen was situated at a crossroad which was a very handy location to be sure, but somewhat dusty, since there was only a very small arc of the compass from which the wind could blow without blowing all the dust raised by passing traffic into the simmering kettles.

Then, too, this was the fly season and these little pests were most annoying. As much of our work was done during the nights we had to count on making up lost sleep during the daylight hours. The flies were not bothersome at night, but during the day they swarmed over the face and arms of anyone attempting to sleep and not only tickled most annoyingly but made rest impossible by biting.

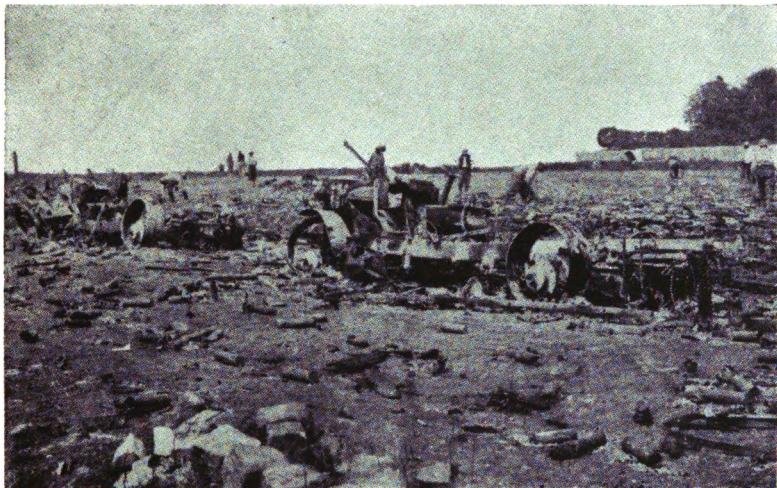
While at Bancy most of our company slept in pup tents. The beautiful weather that had prevailed throughout the

days of the retreat held almost without a break for the entire summer, which was a happy circumstance for us because from March, when we were driven out of our barracks in Soissons, until September we had no other roof over our heads than the leaky tops of the trucks or our flimsy pup-tents.

Our work while at Barcy falls into three distinct phases. First it consisted of supplying ammunition direct from the railheads to the caissons; then we hauled the ammunition which was to be used in the Second Battle of the Marne, storing it in innumerable parks all over the countryside, until it seemed as if there was a case or two of shells under every shrub for miles around; and the final stage of carrying this and other ammunition to the batteries came in July when the Allies began their big push.

Refugees still filed past us during our first days in the new camp, and one morning our doctor's services were requested by one of these poor people to assist in the arrival of a little patriot who was born by the roadside.

A beautiful instance of the phenomenal luck of the Reserve in coming through a bad situation unscathed occurred on the night of June 3rd when a convoy of trucks from Groupes Ordway and Wilcox were unloading ammunition in a park at a fork in the road into May-en-Multien. A French staff car coming up the road switched on its headlights to see which fork to take. The light fell directly on the trucks and park and that brief moment was all that a German plane immediately overhead needed. The bombs scored direct hits on a convoy of nine French-driven Pierce trucks which were waiting to unload, and also set off all the ammunition in the park.



THE MORNING AFTER AND—



TWO DAYS LATER

RUINS OF A CONVOY BOMBED AT MAY-EN-MULTIEN



The ten or fifteen American drivers, whose trucks were practically unloaded, drove their trucks out of the park, all of them getting out safely. Only two of the men, Bowers and Chase, were hit, and they only bruised and slightly cut by bits of the exploding ammunition; whereas ten Frenchmen were killed outright and nine trucks blown to pieces. The foolish officer, whose headlights brought about the disaster, paid for his folly with his life, the first bomb being a direct hit on his car.

About the middle of June another milestone in the annals of the Reserve was reached. Several men from the various companies went to the infirmary with high fevers and no recognizable symptoms. A week after the first men in our company went to the infirmary with this mysterious fever there were but ten men out of the forty-five left on their feet. This fever was discovered to be the 'flu. Our lucky star was still with us: out of the entire Reserve there were very few cases of pneumonia and only two of these proved to be fatal.

During the week following this epidemic there was fortunately very little work on the road and none of that at all exhausting. This period of idleness was accompanied by a wave of discontent and several ungentlemanly exchanges of opinions were made between officers, non-coms and men.

During the latter part of June a detachment of the 42d French field artillery moved to town and this group of men were responsible for one of the most glorious Fourth of July some of us ever spent. They staged a banquet for us at their mess hall with such liberal hospitality that by the time the speeches were called for at the end of the meal most everyone there was fluently eloquent in either or both

languages. The crowning event of the day was the rendition of "Carry me back to Ole Virginny" by our inimitable quartette, who interpreted it so freely and sang so fervently that our French audience mistook it for our National Anthem and immediately stood up and came to attention!

Our plan of giving them a return celebration on their National Holiday, July 14th, was interrupted by later developments in the war.

From the amount of ammunition which we had carried to storage parks during June and the further evidence of heavy traffic of all kinds on the roads it was apparent that an Allied push was not far off.

During the early days of July several French gun crews, hauling up the new 155mm rifles, which had a range of twenty-two kilometers, stopped in at our kitchen for coffee, giving us a chance to look over their guns. Large numbers of these long-barrelled rifles as well as the big 210s went up the road past camp pulled by the giant Renault tractors. The introduction of these big four-wheel-drive tractors into warfare made it possible for large caliber cannon to be used in the field almost as readily as the so-called field artillery.

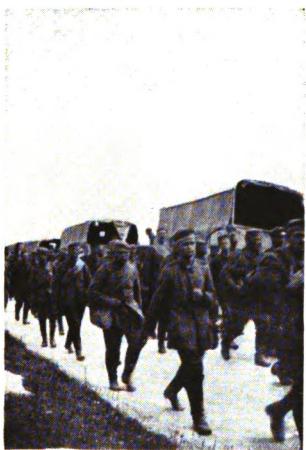
A troop convoy to Champlieu on the night of July 6-7th and an ammunition haul the following day to a park above Viels-Maisons both evidenced great activity. On the latter trip we saw for the first time the speedy little French two-man tanks, which were scuttling off into the protecting forest from the railroad station where they had just arrived. The flexibility and ease with which these baby tanks could be handled was amazing. One of them came chugging up the lane in which one of our trucks was standing and without slowing down went crashing through the bushes at the



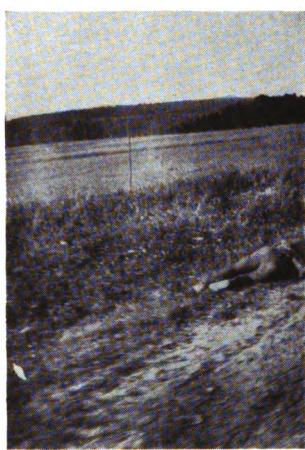
TANK ON WAY TO FRONT



HEAVY ARTILLERY IN ACTION



GERMAN PRISONERS BEING  
TAKEN BACK



DEAD BOCHE

SNAPSHOTS TAKEN DURING THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE  
JULY 1918



side of the road with less than six inches of clearance between his caterpillars and the truck on one side and a house on the other.

During the next week there was a lull in the convoy activity of our company which was broken by the beginning of the Second Battle of the Marne on July 18th. Three days before this started, the Germans either began an offensive of their own or tried to force the Allies into a premature beginning of theirs for there was very heavy artillery action.

The first indication we had of this was on the morning of the 15th when we were awakened by a shell whining its way into Meaux. Six or seven more shells were thrown in by this gun, which like the howitzer used in shelling Soissons, could be heard distinctly before the whine of the shell. On the 17th the intensity of the firing increased greatly and during that night—a beautifully calm summer night—the roar of the cannonade could be heard in Paris, seventy-five kilometers from the front.

All the next day ambulances and motor trucks full of the wounded streamed down the road to Meaux. The infantry had attacked that morning and already the Boches were in retreat.

At midnight came a call for all available trucks to carry up more food for the 75s and for the first time in the history of the Reserve the advance had been so deep and rapid that the convoys went up into the newly won territory.

Sunday, the 21st, one of our convoys took shells to a French battery near Belleau Wood where the Americans had done such splendid fighting, and though a human life is a human life it did seem to bring the war closer to home to see men of our own blood and in our uniform lying there

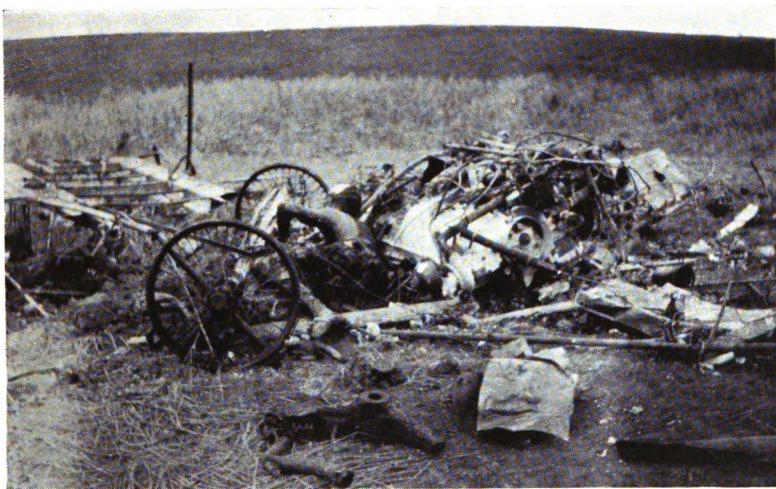
in the fields just as they had fallen. On Tuesday, July 23d, came a call to take up a load of 75s to a battery near Neuilly St. Front. At Dammard the convoy had to halt for a few moments while a *corvée* of Boche prisoners finished removing a demolished house from the street so we could get through. Running across the countryside was a belt of destruction approximately a kilometer wide which marked the high tide of the German invasion. Within this area the towns were totally demolished and only blasted stumps remained where trees had been. Beyond, in the territory over which the Germans had so rapidly advanced and were now so precipitately retreating, the destruction was not so complete.

At Neuilly St. Front the lieutenant met us with the information that the battery for which we were hauling the shells had moved on up since the order had been received at our office and we were to follow on up while he went ahead to locate it.

As we left Neuilly we came on the heavy field artillery blazing away at the Boches, the guns for the most part unprotected by camouflage. The Germans were on the run now and the batteries moved up so often that they did not stop to conceal their guns.

Burying parties were at work in the fields gathering up the dead and interring them. Burial at a time like this when there was so much of it to be done, meant simply identifying the corpse if possible, rolling it into the nearest shell hole, covering it with a foot or two of earth and marking the spot with a little wooden cross.

Most of these bodies had been lying exposed to a broiling hot July sun for a day or more and were in various stages



WRECK OF GERMAN BOMBING PLANE NEAR NEUILLY ST. FRONT



of decomposition. On the hill above Latilly a German artilleryman, killed probably three days before, was lying in the ditch by the roadside in a horrible condition. The hot sun had bloated his body until it seemed in danger of bursting through his uniform; and his mouth was full of the ever present maggots, which were eating the lips away from his discolored face. Flies buzzed around the rotting carcass in swarms, and in the heat of the calm summer afternoon the stench of the putrifying flesh was most nauseating.

Off in a field away from the road was the wreck of a German bombing plane which had been shot down in flames. The two occupants of the plane were lying by the wreckage badly mangled and in the later stages of putrefaction.

In a hollow nearby was the remains of a German or French picket line: a dozen or more horses which had been killed where they were hitched. They, too, were flyblown and putrid. Farther on were four more horses lying where they had been killed in the act of drawing a caisson up the road some days before. The atmosphere was overburdened with the stench of decaying flesh.

While we were parked along the road outside of Latilly waiting for the lieutenant to come back and direct us to the battery, the Boches dropped six shells into the village, killing a Frenchman walking up the road. Most of their attention was being paid to Grissoles a kilometer farther on.

A few minutes later the lieutenant returned to direct us to the battery. As the road above the crest of the hill on the other side of town was exposed to the lines the main part of the convoy was left in the shelter of the hill and the cars taken up two at a time to unload.

The battery of 75s to which we were carrying these shells was one of half a dozen others drawn up in the field beside the road with no attempt at concealment and was busily plugging away while we were unloading.

On every side there was great activity. Batteries moving up to new positions toiled up the road; a group of freshly taken prisoners marched by, guarded by three or four smiling poilus; behind them came two more prisoners under guard carrying a wounded Frenchman on a stretcher; and as we started back for camp the battery, to which we had taken the shells, received its orders to move on up closer to the ever advancing lines.

Throughout July this work continued, convoys going out from the groupe, if not from the company, every day, and each returning with the report of having gone on just a little farther than the previous trip.

Our last convoy from Barcy was one of the most interesting of our experience. During the afternoon of August 1st the 103d heavy artillery of the American 26th Division notified the French that they were running out of ammunition and were in need of more shells for an attack at dawn the following morning. In taking up these shells the Reserve made, if I am not mistaken, its only ammunition haul for the American Army.

The battery to which these shells were to go was in the forest of Fère-en-Tardenois. Darkness overtook us at Grissoles. Beyond Coincy we came into the zone occupied by the batteries of heavy artillery. These were drawn up in positions just off the road, and in the darkness it was impossible to see them. For an hour the convoy crept along this road blinded and deafened every few moments by hav-

ing these six inch guns suddenly cut loose right alongside of the trucks. The concussion of their discharge momentarily upset the carburetion of the motors, making them choke and backfire.

At Beuvardes we passed a regiment of American infantry on its way up to take part in the morning attack and about one in the morning reached the ammunition dump. A week before this spot had been a German shell dump and the woods were full of Boche shells of all calibres which were intended for the drive that was to open the road to Paris. So precipitate had been their retreat before the Allies' push that they had not had time to remove the million rounds of shells which were stored there. During the days and nights since they had withdrawn, the Boches had attempted by means of shell-fire and bombing to ignite the abandoned munitions. The ammunition was still intact but four of the American detail working in the park were in the hospital as a result of it.

Just as we started back for camp the morning barrage was laid down. Our trip back through the batteries which had blinded us on our way up was made easy by the coming of dawn.

When we reached camp there were rumors afloat that we were to move and two days later this rumor materialized.



## *CHAPTER XI*

### **THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME**

**August 8, 1918**

**O**N Sunday, August 4th, we broke camp in the midst of a drizzling rain and set forth for a destination unknown to most of us. That and the following night were spent at Sacy-le-Grand and on Tuesday orders came which took us up into the Somme sector. The trucks and the camp baggage went on to our new billets at Lihus while the others were hauling a load of shells from Breteuil to Chaussoy-Epagny.

On August 8th, two days after our arrival in this sector, the British and French attacked on the front north and east of Amiens with such success that in the afternoon of the same day we hauled shells to the spot where the front lines had been that morning. Returning from this trip to Ber-teaucourt along the great highway leading into Amiens we ran into the heaviest traffic we had yet experienced. Artillery, infantry, loaded lorries and empty ambulances were on their way up, while going in our direction were ambulances and truck loads of the wounded, troops coming back out of action and long lines of German prisoners. It was reported that the Australians had taken captive an entire German division—general, staff officers and all.

We were back in camp at three-thirty in the morning and at noon started out again with orders to take a load of

shells up to Vaumont, a tiny village behind Montdidier. By the time we reached there the French sergeant in charge of the park was nearly crazy. Usually the fuses for each lot of shells were loaded in the last truck of the convoy carrying them. Through some error on the part of the loading park the fuses for all the shells carried by the convoys loading there that day were withheld until the very end. As we were the last convoy to be loaded the entire lot of fuses was sent along with us.

Consequently there was a long line of caissons waiting at the park when we arrived. They were loaded with shells but could not leave until they had the fuses to go with them. It was a little after three in the morning when we pulled into the park and the barrage was due to open up at three-thirty. As soon as each caisson received its quota of fuses they galloped out of the park and up the road to their batteries—one of a very few times I ever saw them move faster than a walk.

This park was up in among the 155s and when the barrage opened up we all agreed that in intensity the firing that morning surpassed anything we had heard.

Two days before the British and French had attacked at Amiens, and on this morning the French were driving at Montdidier. They met with success and by evening had advanced to a depth of eight kilometers.

During that night, August 11-12th, the Reserve suffered its first fatality since it had been taken over by the American Army. A convoy from Groupe Galette was bombed near Moreuil on its way back to camp. Four of the men were wounded and one of them, H. J. Kuszmaul, whose leg was nearly blown off, died of his wounds two days later in

the hospital. Had there been facilities for handling a serious wound within reach at the time of the accident his life could probably have been saved.

The following night—the 13th day of our 13th month in the field—our company suffered its first casualties in almost the same spot that Groupe Galette had been bombed.

Scoles had charge of six cars which had finished unloading ammunition at Hangest-en-Santerre at midnight and were on their way back to camp. At Plessier they noticed that the anti-aircraft searchlights were going and as the convoy proceeded along the exposed road between that town and Moreuil the beams of the searchlights converged above them. A moment later they could hear above the rattle of the trucks the roar of the plane's motor and then six bombs crashed down on them.

Scoles dropped off the first truck to see if all were safe and only five of his six trucks were present. Full of apprehension he walked back to the spot where the bombing had occurred. There was the missing truck head on in the ditch, its top blown in and nobody in sight.

The drivers had taken cover in the field after being wounded by the bomb which had blown in the top of the truck. Oddly enough both of them were wounded in the calf of their legs.

Scoles backed the truck out of the ditch, drove the men to a hospital—a French hospital—where he gave instructions that the wounded men should not be evacuated from that hospital until our lieutenant came the following morning—and then drove the damaged car home himself. For his coolness and presence of mind in taking care of the men on his convoy he was justly decorated with the *Croix de Guerre*.

Inspection of the trucks which had been bombed showed that four out of the six were riddled with *éclat* and the one on which Corenski and Forman, the wounded men, had been riding had its top caved in by the blast. How the two men escaped being killed is just another instance of the phenomenal luck of the Reserve.

There is little of interest to mention in connection with the convoys which went out during the next few days. They were all much the same, consisting principally of ammunition hauls to the parks at Hangest and Faverolles. Montdidier was a great shock to us. The previous autumn when we had been there, it was a thriving town miles from the front. During the fighting which had taken place in and about the city during the last five months hardly a building had been left standing. The beautiful town had been reduced to battered, smoking ruins.

Our camp at Lihus had been moved up to Hardivillers on August 11th in order to be nearer our field of activity. On the 19th I went on furlough to Aix-les-Bains, and when I returned to Hardivillers on the last of August there were no signs of the company. I was just beginning to wonder how I was to get up to the new camp when one of the officers from our headquarters rattled into town in his Ford to pick up a few odds and ends which had been left behind. I persuaded him that I was included in this category and he took me back to my groupe which was now stationed at Bus, a battered little village off the beaten track east of Montdidier.

Here the company had found shelter in some of the less battered buildings and dugouts. As the nights were beginning to get cooler and there was an increasingly heavier fall



RUINS OF MONTDIDIER



MINE CRATER



of rain we were glad to be again with roofs over our heads.

Our work of hauling shells continued without a break. Often on our way back to camp after dark the sky to the northeast was aglow with the light of the burning villages which the Boches had fired as they retreated.

By the 11th of September the Boches had been driven so far back that our convoys were taking ammunition across the Somme to a park at Douilly. On these trips our load had to be limited to two tons as the pontoon bridges would not bear the weight of a full five ton load. The roads were in an almost impassable condition from the shelling, heavy traffic and rains, and driving over them at night became more and more difficult. Considering the possibilities for accidents and trouble there were remarkably few of either.

Our ammunition hauls were varied from time to time with *ravitaillement* convoys to the ever advancing French Armies.

Further encouragement with regard to the progress of the battle came from the American Sector and the reports of the St. Mihiel drive. Our hopes for a speedy termination of the war daily rose higher. The Boches were on the run and the notorious Hindenburg Line was broken beyond repair.

On September 22d word came that we were to move to a different sector and on the following day we set forth for the unknown.



## *CHAPTER XII*

### **THE FINAL DAYS IN THE CHAMPAGNE SECTOR**

**I**N the middle of the afternoon of September 23d we pulled out of battered little Bus and started a long trek into the Champagne Sector. The first night on our journey we spent at St. Martin-Longueaux and at midnight the following evening reached Port-à-Binson. Here my connections with Groupe Lamade came to an end and with three others I went to Groupe Browning which was then stationed at Dormans.

During the latter part of September we supplied ammunition to the parks at Arcis-le-Ponsart and the Bois de Dole. The Germans were making a stand along the Vesle River and it was not until early October that they withdrew to the old positions along the Aisne.

The first really significant sign that the collapse of the Central Empires was near came on the first of October when the papers announced that Bulgaria had surrendered unconditionally.

It was at this time that the Reserve first carried the French two-man tanks. Groupe Lamade hauled thirty-four of these tanks from Somme-Suippe to the front near Medeah Farm, where the Boches had a strong foothold. The following day the French took the farm.

By reason of this advance the Germans were flanked and

were forced to withdraw from in front of Rheims. For over four years this town had been within rifle shot of the Boches and was a dangerous place for convoys on account of the continual shelling to which it was subjected. But on October 6th the enemy had retreated 15 kilometers and once again the city was open to traffic.

On the 11th our groupe moved up again to be closer in touch with the ever advancing armies. During our three weeks here at Savigny our work was about equally divided between ammunition and ravitaillement hauls.

The Germans were in full retreat over the whole front and were withdrawing so fast that the French found it difficult to keep in contact with them. This matter of keeping in contact was rendered extremely difficult by reason of the scientific manner in which the Boches had destroyed all means of communication as they fled. All bridges were, of course, dynamited and the tracks of all the railway lines were torn up. The roads had been blocked by felled trees and, more effective than that, by means of mining. These mines were usually planted at such strategic spots as cross-roads and their explosion left craters that ranged in size from twenty or thirty yards across and three or four in depth, to huge chasms a hundred and fifty to two hundred yards across and thirty or forty feet deep.

The smaller craters were filled in and thus made passable but the larger ones were much too big to repair in that manner. To get around these it was necessary to build plank or corduroy roads connecting the broken ends of the road. In either circumstance it was difficult to get over with the loaded trucks. In the case of the smaller craters the earth with which they were filled was so soft that the heavy

trucks could hardly pull through them; and in the case of the large craters the trucks had great difficulty in getting over the slippery plank roads and often broke through the guard rail at the edge and slid into the soft earth at the side. When this occurred it was necessary to unload the truck, tow it out of the mire and then reload it, a most unpleasant task on a rainy night.

On our ravitaillement hauls to Juvincourt and the ammunition hauls to Prouvais, both on the north side of the Aisne above Berry-au-Bac, we ran into great difficulties on account of these mine craters.

Several of the convoys unloading at Prouvais, which was visible for miles across the flat country, were shelled out of the park and had to wait until dusk to unload.

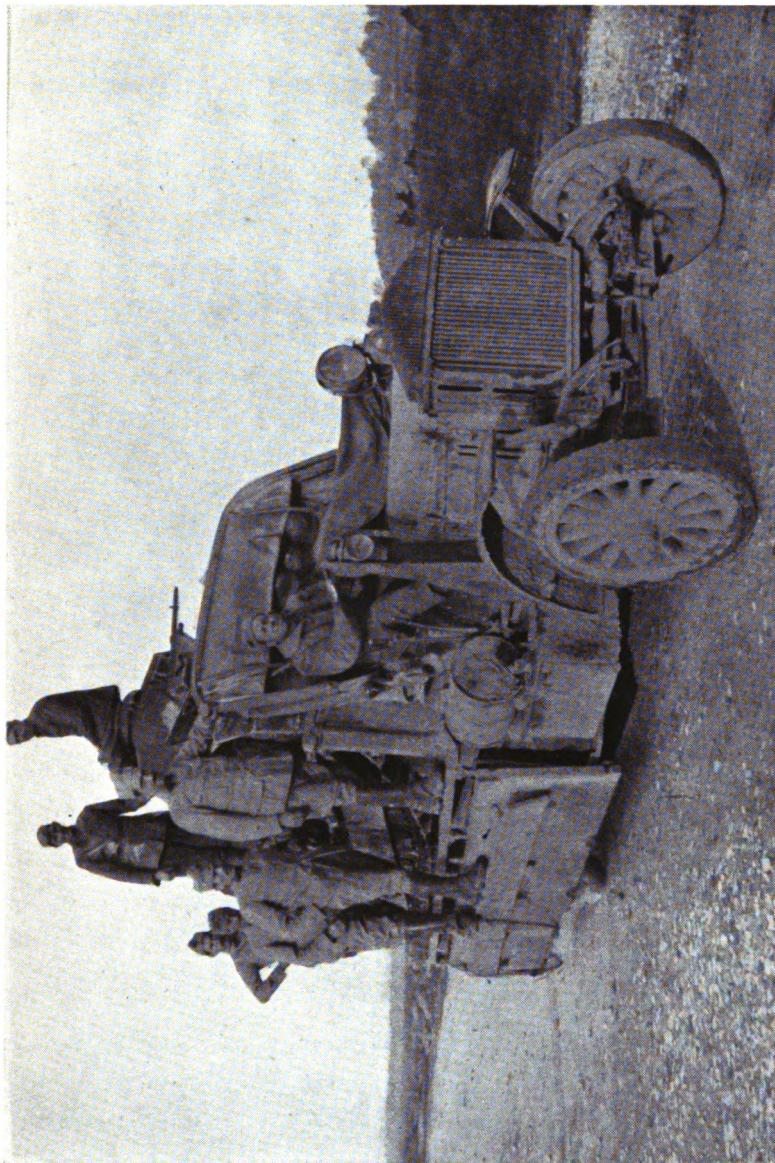
During the night of October 22d, there occurred at Berry au-Bac a traffic jam which delayed an attack the French were planning, for fifty-two hours with disastrous results. Groupe Lamade had been given the job of carrying 225 tanks from Rheims to Lor, 30 kilometers north, and the trucks carrying the tanks were routed over the bridge at Berry-au-Bac, which was the only bridge of a ten ton capacity within miles. This bridge, however, was not strong enough to hold the combined weight of a five ton truck and a seven and a half ton tank, and when the convoy carrying the tanks arrived at this point the trouble started. At first the trucks broke through the plank road leading to the bridge, and when this had been repaired and strengthened it was found that the trucks did not have enough power to pull their overload up the steep corduroy road on the other side of the bridge. There was further delay while someone went after a Renault tractor to help the struggling camions

up the grade. The colossal strength of these big tractors is almost unbelievable. The trucks carrying the tanks were being towed by empty trucks and even with their combined power they were unable to get up the hill. When the tractor came it was hooked onto the two trucks, which were then unable to use their power on account of the slow speed of the tractor, and this remarkable machine towed the two trucks and tank—a combined weight of seventeen and a half tons—up the steep slippery grade from the bridge to the road.

While this was going on the vehicles bringing up ammunition and supplies for the attack were held up until there was a solid line of traffic from Berry almost to Rheims, a distance of ten or twelve kilometers.

The following night while the last of the tanks were being taken up to Lor the Germans were shelling the wood in which the tanks were being unloaded. The last company to unload was Company C, which was commanded by Lieutenant G. L. Edwards, Jr., who was to leave for the States the next day. His company had finished unloading and started for camp, but to make sure that all of the trucks were safely out of the park he went back on foot to take a last look, and in the performance of this last duty of his overseas service he met his death. A shell burst within three feet of him wounding him so badly that he never regained consciousness. He died in the hospital at Guignicourt the next day and was buried with military honors in the hospital cemetery. The entire Reserve mourned the loss of one of its finest officers and gentlemen.

When the attack finally did come off it was so costly in lives for the amount of territory gained that no mention



TANK LOADED ON TRUCK



was ever made of it in the papers. Two incidents in connection with the action were told us later by an American serving with the French artillery.

On account of the fifty-two hour delay in the attack the Germans were prepared to meet it when it came. They had discovered a defense against tanks which was most effective. In the early days of tank warfare they had used deep ditches as a defense, but these were difficult to construct and could be made useless as a defense by a few well aimed shells or by filling them in with bundles of sticks brought up by the tanks; another defense used was steel cable stretched between concrete pillars; the final and most effective defense was the use of contact mines. The ground in front of the trenches fearing an attack by tanks was planted with these contact mines, which exploded whenever they were hit by a tank or other heavy object. The Boches had mined the ground in front of their trenches so effectively that 80% of the tanks used in the attack were destroyed.

The second disaster was the massacre of two regiments of French infantry which were waiting in a ravine a few miles from the front for their orders to go up. Somehow the Boches found out they were there and for five minutes concentrated all their artillery which was within range on this one ravine, wiping out the two regiments almost to a man.

On October 28th our group moved for an eventful few days to billets in Rheims. Here we lived in luxury for one wonderful week until our officers found it necessary to move away on account of the liquor question. Wine was more plentiful and easy to find than water—it was to be had free for the stealing—and anyone who has had anything to do with the average American doughboy knows that he has

not the faintest idea how to drink decently. Our cooks weren't sober for the entire week and it was almost impossible to find enough men to take out a convoy who were in such a condition that they could sit up without the aid of a prop, to say nothing of being able to drive a truck.

Our work on the road continued, consisting mostly of shell hauls to Prouvais and Poilcourt and ravitaillement convoys to Juvincourt.

The Germans' last foothold in France was in the sector north of here, where they had positions which, by the nature of the country, were practically impregnable. Here they stuck until on November 5th the French flanked them on both sides and thus rendered their position untenable.

As soon as they were driven back from these positions we moved up from St. Brice, a suburb of Rheims where we had stayed for five days after leaving the Champagne City, to new billets at Asfeld.

It was from Asfeld, on November 9th, that the last wartime convoy from our groupe set out. We left camp at half past four in the morning, waited all day at the loading station at Pignicourt for the officer in charge of the park to find out what we were to carry, and finally were loaded and set forth in the darkness for the tiny hamlet of Forest, 30 kilometers north, with the pleasant prospect of an all night struggle over roads which from shelling, mining and rain had become all but impassable. All but one car, which sank up to its hub in the soft earth filling a shell hole a mile from our destination, reached the unloading station. As our friends of the 10th Division Infantry for whom we were hauling, had not arrived when we pulled in at midnight there was nothing to do but wait for them.

Our lieutenant arrived on the scene at 1 a. m. with hot stew which he had brought out to us from camp. Gathering around the cheerful glow of an open fire in a battered little cottage, which we had appropriated for the night, we ate our midnight meal and then curled up in a tangled mess of humanity to get such sleep as we could before the wagons from our lost division should arrive.

Heaven only knows how the forty of us ever found space to lie down in that tiny room. The lieutenant slept in a drunken looking clothespress; three of the men snored loudly on a mangy looking bed in another corner; one of the more limber members of our company went to sleep on top of a round table which was no more than three feet across; the rest of us were sprawled out in a tangled mess of arms, legs and feet on the tile floor.

At half past three the door suddenly burst open and the good-natured sergeant of the 10th Division popped into the room. Although he had walked 20 kilometers across country to get to us he was still in good humor and made some witty remarks, typically French, about the way we were sleeping.

The lieutenant, from his bed in the clothespress, opened one eye long enough for the sergeant to see whom he was addressing and asked him 'wher'n 'ell his wagons were.' The Frenchman replied that they would arrive in the morning and then, thoroughly tired out with his long hike through the cold and the mud, joined the merry company and was soon snoring more loudly than anyone.

The fourgons arrived at sunrise and soon afterwards we were on our way back to camp. By way of amusement on this return trip I counted the dead horses which lined the

roads. There were fifty-three of these carcasses all in the advanced stages of decomposition, and also one poor German whom the burial squads had overlooked. It was quite evident that he had died a violent death; some good Samaritan had gathered up into a blanket such of the pieces as could be found and left them in a ditch by the roadside for somebody else to inter.

The following day, November 11th, we received the official announcement that "*La guerre est finie!*"

## *CHAPTER XIII*

### THE ARMISTICE AND AFTER

**T**HAT was interesting to learn later that the Armistice came as a surprise to most of the people in America. To us it came so gradually that we did not rush wildly forth into the street yelling at the top of our lungs, nor dance on the sidewalk, nor upset taxicabs in glee as they did in Paris.

We had witnessed the first breaking of the German lines in July, followed by the later successes from one end of the front to the other in August and September. On October 1st Bulgaria had collapsed; a month later Turkey threw in the sponge; at this time Austria was making peace overtures with the Italians and on November 4th signed an Armistice with them. The morale of the German army, if not of all Germany, was tottering badly and on the 5th collapsed entirely when they lost their last foothold in the Champagne Sector. On the 7th the German envoys—Erzberger, Winterfeld, Gundell and Count von Oberndorf—came to discuss terms with the Allies.

It was no great surprise after such a prelude to learn that the war was really over. We merely said “is it possible?” and started discussing our chances of being sent home. Some of the optimists were predicting that we would eat our Christmas dinner in the States!

The war was over, but there was work ahead for us—had

we been able to foresee the drudgery of the coming winter we never would have been able to face it. As it was, we were continually thinking that our release was just a short time ahead, and with this hope to buoy us up we were able to carry on.

Commandant Mallet, realizing that with the cessation of hostilities there would be a let-down feeling in the Reserve, issued on the day after the Armistice the following *Décision*, which was designed to keep us from taking too big a slump.

**GRAND QUARTIER GENERAL.**  
*Direction des Services Automobiles.*

**RESERVE MALLET.**

November 12, 1922.

Today, when France and her Allies are magnificently rewarded for the sacrifices undergone during more than four years by the most complete victory in history, I express my heartfelt thanks to the personnel of the Reserve, officers and men, French and American, for the unceasing devotion of which they gave proof under every circumstance.

I am proud to command an organization in which every member has shown such a high regard for duty and for the importance of his task.

All will be happy to feel today that the effort furnished by the Reserve contributed its part towards the final victory. I wish particularly to express my gratitude to our comrades of the American Field Service, who came to offer their aid to France at a time when they were under no obligation to take part in the war, and who were in a way the link between the Armies of France, which had been struggling since the beginning of hostilities, and the great American Army without which the victory of right would not have been possible.

I pay tribute to all members of the Reserve who have lost their lives during the campaign and particularly to our dear friend First Lieutenant Edwards, who fell on the field of honor barely three weeks before the cessation of hostilities.

Our work is not finished. Our duty now is to make a last effort

and to replace the means of communication destroyed by the enemy during his retreat. This effort will be hard, but the security of our armies of occupation, the provisioning of our soldiers and of the civil population must be assured before all.

I am confident that I can depend on all to accomplish this task to the end.

MALLET.

Added to the natural hazards of long night trips and ruined roads was the chance of our ancient and honorable trucks, which were worn out with the pace at which they had been going during the last five months, breaking down miles from camp. Hardly a convoy went out that didn't return with one or more cars on the end of a rope.

Our function after the Armistice was to transport the supplies which in ordinary times were shipped by railroad. The railways of this territory had been so scientifically wrecked that it would be months before train service could be established.

On November 18th our groupe moved up to Novy and during the following month our work consisted entirely of ravitaillement convoys from the railheads at Le Chatelet and Neuflize south of Rethel to the warehouses in Sedan and Mézières-Charleville, the depot at Carignan and even such distant and remote points as Bertrix, a little town 15 kilometers over the Belgian border. Most of these trips were utterly devoid of interest and excitement, though there are one or two incidents worth mentioning.

On November 23d, nearly two weeks after the Armistice, a convoy returning from Belgium witnessed an occurrence which illustrates how it was that the French came to call the Germans "Boches." As the convoy entered the little village of Montigny they were startled by a terrific explo-

sion which wrecked one of the houses on the main street. A mine with a delayed fuse had been planted under this house by the Germans and here, two weeks after the cessation of hostilities, the infernal machine exploded, wrecking the house and killing two innocent old peasant women. Numerous such incidents were reported in the papers.

Another bit of excitement of a different nature occurred in the muddy freight yard of Neuflize where one of our convoys was loading. At the same time a trainload of steers was being driven from the freight cars to a nearby slaughterhouse. Several of our men were watching the amusing spectacle of seeing steers sit down on their haunches and slide down the runways into the muddy yard. Mixed in with the gentle and submissive beeves was a real, honest-to-goodness bull, who was in a bad humor after his travels. He cleared the runway with one jump and landed with a snort and a splash in the middle of the freight yard. With hardly a pause to look around, the bull started after the first man he saw. Brown dodged with the dexterity of a Spanish bullfighter and made for cover. The bull having missed his first objective immediately started after another of our company who escaped by a hasty ascent of a large pile of baled hay. With his appetite for blood still unappeased he made after a decrepit old French territorial, who was not agile enough to escape. The bull tossed him and trampled on him and probably would have gored him to death had it not been for the quickness of the only man in the freight yard who had a revolver. The Frenchman was removed to a hospital and the bull to the packing house.

On December 12th we moved up to Bazeilles where the French marines made the last heroic stand against von der

Tann's Bavarian troops in the War of 1870. Here our "home by Christmas" hopes vanished into thin air and as the months wore on our spirits sank lower and lower.

During the winter the outfit suffered several unnecessary discomforts. In the first place our diet became monotonous and unhealthy. Due to the fact that there were no green vegetables to be had for two months, over half the company suffered from indigestion and hives—two conditions which are ruinous to dispositions. Then, too, our shoes, which were hardly ever dry, went to pieces and the shoe shortage became so serious that we finally had to beg shoes from the Red Cross in Sedan.

The monotony of our daily routine was broken occasionally by pleasure trips in the lieutenant's staff car to the little Belgian town, Bouillon, where there was a hotel with an excellent cuisine. There were also entertainments given under the auspices of the Y. M. C. A. at the theater in Sedan.

The outstanding convoy of the winter was a three day trip in the middle of the coldest spell of the entire season. We started at four in the morning of February 13th to carry troops and baggage from Bouillon to Amiens. It was one of the best run convoys we ever had, for, on account of its length, the cars undertaking it were the pick of the Reserve. The trip out was done ahead of schedule every stage: Rethel the first night, La Fère the second, and Amiens the third. Coming back the empty trucks broke all records over the smoothly packed snow and some of them did the entire distance in one day's run.

On one of our ravitaillement hauls we witnessed a modern version of a well known scene in Dickens' "Tale of Two

Cities." One of the trucks was loaded with casks of wine and during the course of the journey the bung of one of the barrels was jolted out and the wine flowed on to the floor of the truck. The first we knew of this leak was when we started up a slight grade in Mézières. There was a shout from the populace on the sidewalks and immediately people came tumbling out of doors, windows and passing vehicles with buckets, cups, vases, wash-boilers, pitchers, in short anything that would hold a liquid, and knocked each other down in their efforts to get a position at the tailboard of the truck from which was pouring a veritable torrent of wine. By the time the leaky cask was located and plugged almost the entire fifty gallons were gone, and the truck was surrounded by a joking, jostling crowd crying for more!

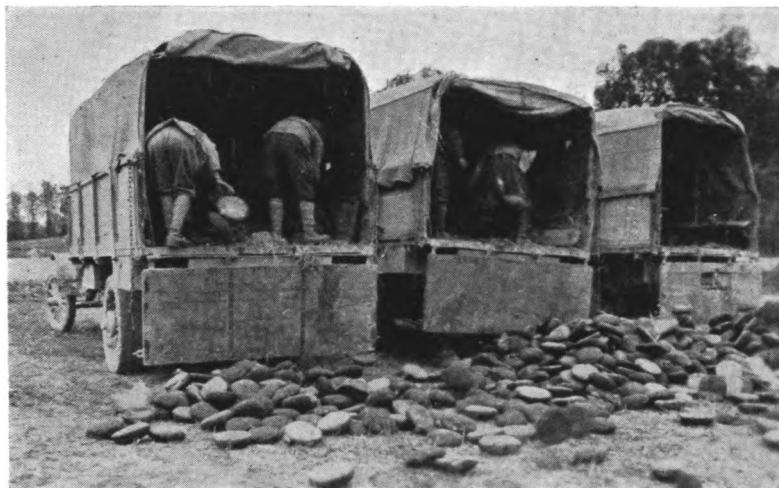
On March 21st came orders which moved our groupes from Bazeilles down to Auzeville, a God-forsaken mudhole ten miles west of Verdun, where we spent the two miserable months of the early Spring. Discipline and dispositions were then at their lowest ebb and life was most unpleasant.

On April 1st came the first real indication that we might go home sometime before the summer was out. We were set to training young Frenchmen to drive the trucks.

Finally on May 6th we turned the trucks over to them, and from then on we were all cheered up by the developments with regard to our going home.

On May 15th, fourteen or more months after they were applied for, our sergeants' warrants came through.

During the next four days the various groupes of the Reserve gathered from near and far and on the 19th we were transported in trucks, as we had so often transported French troops, to Poix-Terron where our box car pullmans were



**METHOD OF UNLOADING BREAD**



**PINARD AND POTATOES**



waiting for us. After a cold night on the bare floors of the empty cars we were lined up and inspected and finally pulled out in the late afternoon amid much cheering, headed for Le Mans.

Our week at Le Mans was just one darn inspection after another until everything was arranged to the authorities' satisfaction. On May 29th orders to leave for the embarkation camp were received. The main part of the Reserve went thither while a small detachment of us, who were to be mustered out in France, went to St. Aignan where we gained our freedom on June 3d.

I have heard but little about the Reserve's voyage home. A letter received from one who made the trip contained a few caustic remarks about the use of sea-going tugs as transports, bunks by the boiler room and cold beans for breakfast on a rough morning. But after all, these trifling discomforts were sunk in the joy of getting back to the freedom of civil life and the comforts of home!

#### L'ENVOI

Back to the life we used to know,  
But somehow it isn't the same;  
The sparkle's out of the wine of life,  
The zest is gone from the game.  
The old-time yoke is on my neck,  
I tug at the old-time load,  
But my heart is back in a gray old town  
At the end of a hard, white road!

J. S. MONTGOMERY



## **APPENDIX**



## **OPERATIONS IN WHICH THE RESERVE TOOK PART**

### **For Both Groupements:**

- \*Chemin des Dames Defensive, June and July 1917.
- \*Malmaison and Chemin des Dames Offensive, October 18–31, 1917.
- \*Cambrai Offensive, November 20–27, 1917.
- Somme Defensive, March 21 to April 6, 1918.
- Aisne Defensive, May 27 to June 5, 1918.
- Montdidier-Noyon Defensive, June 9–13, 1918.
- Champagne-Marne Defensive, July 15–18, 1918.
- Second Battle of the Marne, July 18 to August 6, 1918.

### **For Groupement 8:**

- Second Battle of the Somme, August 8 to September 9, 1918.
- Oise-Aisne Offensive, September 10 to October 11, 1918.
- Somme Offensive, October 14 to November 11, 1918.

### **For Groupement 9:**

- Second Battle of the Somme, August 8 to September 17, 1918.
- Oise-Aisne Offensive, September 18–29, 1918.
- Meuse-Argonne Offensive, October 1 to November 11, 1918.

\*Not recognized by American G. H. Q.

## A FEW INTERESTING STATISTICS

A news item in the January 31, 1919 issue of "The Stars and Stripes" stated that the U. S. Army during its entire participation in the war used approximately 3,500,800 shells including shrapnel, high explosive and gas. Compare that figure with the quantity of ammunition and other material hauled by the Reserve in merely the last six months of the war.

Over 6,000,000 shells of all calibers; 23,488 tons of infantry ammunition; 180,000 troops; 259 tanks; a number of 75mm batteries and caissons, and trench mortars; and a large quantity of baggage and ravitaillement.

From April 1, 1918 to January 1, 1919 an aggregate total of 1,061,102 kilometers was travelled by trucks of the Reserve—a distance equivalent to  $26\frac{1}{2}$  times the circumference of the globe.

During the war the Reserve served on the front from Amiens almost to Verdun, and the territory covered has an area of approximately 52,000 square kilometers.

If all the trucks of the Reserve were parked in one line with the regular spacing of 5 yards between trucks, they would form a line  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length. A convoy of the entire Reserve on the road would be approximately 15 miles long.

Decorations held by members of the Reserve include two *Legion d'honneur*, one *Medaille Militaire*, seventeen *Croix de Guerre*, a Section Citation and a number of Certificates of Merit.

The longest convoy of the Reserve was the trip from Bouillon to Amiens and return, February 11-14, 1919, a distance of close to 475 kilometers; on this convoy stops were made for the night. The next longest was the Chalons trip, April 13-15, 1918, a distance of 450 kilometers with three hours of rest out of fifty-two on the road. The third place is held by the Montdidier trip, November 20-22, 1917, during which the Reserve did 300 kilometers in forty-nine hours with only one hour for rest.

The unofficial long distance record for continuous duty in camp and on the road without sleep is held by certain members of Groupe Lamade who, during the Great Retreat in May 1918, went from six o'clock Monday morning until four o'clock Thursday morning without sleep—70 hours.

The record for the number of hours on the road for all available trucks is held by Groupe Wilcox. In August 1918 the trucks of that groupe were out on convoy 669 hours out of a possible 744.

The casualties of the Reserve show that two of its members were killed in action, two died of disease, and about ten were wounded.

It is remarkable that with all the jumping on and off moving trucks on convoy no one was seriously hurt. Drivers of the Reserve ran over and killed two Frenchmen and one Englishman, but in all cases these accidents were not due to the fault of the drivers.

## VOCABULARY

*abri*: shelter, i. e. a dugout.

*à droite par quatre*: infantry drill command meaning, squads right.

*arrivée*: an incoming shell.

*buvette*: a public drinking house; the center of the social life in a small town.

*caissière*: cashier.

*camion*: motor truck.

*corvée*: corresponds to the American Army term, detail; i. e. a detail of men assigned to do a certain job.

*décision*: a General Order.

*droite*: right.

*éclat*: burst, i. e. a shell fragment.

*en ligne*: *face à gauche*: left front into line.

*en panne*: out of order; unable to go.

*en repos*: to rest billets, off duty.

*fourgon*: a military wagon.

*gare*: station, depot.

*gauche*: left.

*genie matériel*: any of the material used by the engineers in constructing dugouts, trenches, etc.

*G. Q. G.*: *Grand Quartier General*: French General Headquarters.

*kilometer*: equivalent to five-eighths of a mile, i.e., 8 kilos. = 5 miles.

*mm* or *millimeter*: the approximate caliber relations of the French to American cannon are: 37mm =  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ";

75mm = 3"; 150mm = 6"; 210mm = 10"; 320mm =  
12"; 42cm = 16".

*pinard*: French slang for vin ordinaire, cheap red wine.

*poilu*: a private in the French army.

*ravitaillement*: rations, provisions.

*remorque*: a two wheeled trailer 6 x 10 ft. with 5 ft. of headroom, used as living quarters.

*rondins*: logs for building corduroy roads, etc.

*Section*: a company; 18 trucks.

*tracer shell*: a shell with a magnesium flare; used against air-craft at night; the course of the shell across the sky looks like a shooting star.

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